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The Party: A Play in One Act

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THE PARTY: A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by

Derrek Schrader

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(English)

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Abstract

The writing and directing of a full-length play entitled *The Party* began as a novel about a woman throwing a party, and it morphed into an abstract piece of literature that comments on and highlights the effects of depression. It was adapted for the stage, and through the adaptation, it explored the symbolic and aesthetic elements of depression that the novel was physically unable to explore. In addition, it examined the desperation and daunting nature of depression through the use of character, depicting its effects in an unsettling way.

Through the directing of this play, the words became tangible. Multiple directing techniques were experimented with, and knowledgable insight was gained about the effectivity of each. The process of translating a vision from mind, to paper, to person was attained, and invaluable communication skills were developed.

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Artist's Statement

Writing draws parallels between the mind and the heart. Emotional matters can be conceptualized, honed, and crafted into a brilliant fabric of words, enabling them to take shape and make sense. I write to comprehend and explain the poignant capabilities of the human mind when placed under specific circumstances, and the complexities behind those capabilities. Language eliminates walls and barriers to reveal the true, naked self: its sorrow, its beauty, and everything in between.

I wrote *The Party* as a way to explore depression and anxiety, and the human ability to empathize. I not only want my readers to fully grasp what it is like to have these disorders, but I want them to know what it is like to *live* with these disorders. *The Party* is written to be an immersive experience; I want audiences to feel confused, overwhelmed, and trapped. I want them to feel as Virginia feels, if only for a moment, so they can experience the world through her eyes. It is imperative that this empathetic exchange occur, otherwise the audience will be incapable of truly understanding Virginia's position. My intentions are to extend beyond the words, to delve into the disgusting and gritty details of depression, to touch people in a disturbing and intimate way, and to encourage them not to disregard the disorder. I want to utilize my abilities as a writer and director to influence others to see the world from another's perspective, to acquire empathetic skills, and to openly discuss depression.

Theatre is the most effective platform for this exploration. It contains the element of realism due to its live nature, which is the most intrinsic way to connect deeply with others. The audience is forced to watch a real person undergo real trauma and heartbreak

without the numbing effects of a screen or distance nulling their exposure. I want the audience to have the experience of sitting and watching something they are not intended to see, and that they are powerless to stop it from unfolding. I have always enjoyed that element of theatre, that inability to escape. It is easy to stop a movie or put down a book, but it is impossible to pause live theatre.

I chose to write and direct this piece to ensure that my intentions are fully realized, and to demonstrate the breadth and depth of knowledge I have acquired both in writing and in theatrics. I want to examine the differences between being a playwright and being a director, and the struggles and rewards that come part and parcel with each. Lastly, I want to study the human potential for empathy and its impact, and why human connection is the most important aspect of life.

The Writing Process

It started with a sentence. *Virginia threw on her coat and stepped outside.* That's when I knew I had a story to tell. I was not quite sure who Virginia was or why she was stepping outside, but I knew it was something I needed to explore. Virginia intrigued me—her acute attention to detail, her sensitive nature, her inability to accept the truth. I wanted to discover what caused her behavior, what and who influenced her thoughts. That was the core of the novel's intention. The plot was to be secondary to her character, as I wanted her persona to develop rather than the storyline. I chose something trivial like throwing a party to pay homage to *The Hours*, and to explore how and why trivial events and moments deeply affect Virginia. I felt that a party could best demonstrate the relationship with her family—specifically, how she feels about them all gathering under the same roof despite their having been broken for so long. I wanted to show how something trite can harbor deep meaning depending on how and by whom it is perceived and processed.

Initially, I had planned on having the party actually happen. I was going to write the novel in two parts: in the first half, Virginia prepares for the party, and the second half is the party itself. However, once I started delving into Virginia's character, I realized how interesting it would be to never have the party occur, but to allow it to remain as something internal, completely locked in her head. I noticed how much power and influence the party gained once it became something intangible. That allowed me to expand the importance of the party into an extreme realm. Rather than having the party simply be a meeting ground for the family, it was now what would either completely fix

her family or send them spiraling further into dysfunction. Giving it that weight justifies Virginia's heightened emotions, and gives her reason to be antsy and uncomfortable.

However, I soon realized that the party itself would never live up to the potency with which Virginia brandished it—there was no way that Mother, Father, April, Lenny, Marvin, and Mrs. Bell were going to maintain their essence if they were seen in any real interactions with one another. The only characters with whom Virginia interacts are Mrs. Bell, Marvin, and Father. This creates a multi-textural relationship between these characters and Virginia, as it offers a true insight into the way in which she engages with them. Despite what Marvin, Father, and Mrs. Bell say to her, it is difficult not to feel empathetic towards them for having to skate around Virginia's sensitivities. These three characters are the most significant, because Virginia herself feels guilty for having ever negatively affected them, and I want the readers to feel this same way. In these dialogues, the reader becomes fully aware of Virginia's impact on the people in her life.

Lenny, Mother, and April are much colder and calculating than the other three because, again, that is how Virginia views them. By having them never actually present in the novel, Virginia is able to paint them in any light she sees fit without offering any evidence to counteract her claims. How she views them is how they are described—the reader either believes her or deems her unreliable. The stark contrast between her relationships with the former and the latter draws into question the validity of each, and creates the mystery of what is real and what is imagined.

Symbolism is a pivotal element in the novel. Because Virginia places heavy emphasis on the little things in her life, the objects around her need to be multi-faceted to

reflect this. For example, the cake represents her relationship with Marvin, Marvin himself, and the baby she desperately wants to have with him. The coiling petals of the flowers represent her feelings of being trapped and isolated, and the harboring of dark secrets. The cats represent the neighbors, and those who sit idly by as she descends into madness. These symbols help the reader further connect to Virginia's mind, and allow parallels to be made throughout the twisting narrative to conceptualize it. There are recurring images and italic phrases sprinkled throughout the story to help visualize the world in which Virginia lives. Colors, objects, and visuals are all important aspects of the novel that shape Virginia, and they bring the novel to new heights and depths.

I never had any intentions of adapting this story into a play. I went into writing this piece fully intent on having it remain a novel and a novel alone. However, I knew I wanted to write and direct a full-length play for my Honors Thesis, and I also thought that these characters and this story were unfinished, that they needed another platform upon which to expand and explore. With this in mind, I signed up for ICD 510, Topics in Creative Production. The class would allow me to write something for the purposes of production—i.e., a play—and would be the perfect opportunity to adapt my novel while receiving supportive feedback from a professional.

The most challenging aspect of adapting the novel was translating Virginia's interior world into something tangible. Now, instead of allowing the characters and events to live in her mind, I had to broadcast her thoughts and emotions through dialogue and action. I also had to decide how to keep the entire story in one location, as opposed to the novel, which traverses between Virginia's home, Mrs. Bell's home, the grocery store,

the park, and the florist's. This was effectively handled through surrealism. Rather than having Virginia go to the grocery store and run into Marvin there, I had Marvin enter her home with a grocery cart and the ingredients. Rather than having Virginia go to the florist's, April brings Virginia the flowers. Rather than having Virginia visit Mrs. Bell at Mrs. Bell's house, Mrs. Bell visits Virginia at Virginia's house. This kept everything in one central location, and played on the idea of Virginia feeling *stuck* and *trapped* in her home and in her mind, while people traipsed in and out of her life. I latched onto the idea of people bringing her things—Marvin with the cart, the cigarettes, and the List; Lenny with the green heart-shaped clock; Father with the blue comb; April with the flowers; Mrs. Bell with the trunk and the gun. Not only did it make the entire story seem dreamlike, but it also directly conveyed how Virginia viewed them (as people who fully influenced her decisions and actions), and how she viewed herself (as someone entirely incapable of doing things for herself). Everyone in the play is pigmented through Virginia's lens, which makes them all inherently un-relatable and one-dimensional.

The novel contains thick and complex imagery and symbolism, which was another ardent task to tackle. I needed the timing and the presence of certain props, colors, and characters to correlate with certain events and phrases, while still maintaining even pacing and plot progression. I essentially transposed Virginia's thoughts into the voices and actions of the characters in her life, deliberating as necessary, rather than having them remain inside her head. I also allowed for significant overlap in certain pieces of dialogue (references to the easiness of baking a cake, the fence, love), so that each of the characters acted as different extensions of the same prototype. That made

them all seem to stem from the same place (Virginia's mind), while still giving them some sense of self-identity. I initially had Virginia spewing off monologues and speaking to herself throughout the play, but I realized that it felt too much like a play of exposition rather than a play of visuals, so I scrapped five pages worth of dialogue and replaced it with the presence of characters and actions. Rather than having Virginia speak about Marvin and Sylvia's love affair, I had Marvin and Sylvia act it out on the stove behind Virginia while Virginia stirred the ingredients of the cake together—both alluding to the affair and alluding to the creation of a baby. I also had to shift a few things around in terms of placement, specifically Father's arrival. In the novel, he phones Virginia during Chapter 2, which is relatively early on. In the play, he enters during Scene 5 to create a direct change in energy, and so that his presence is felt much later on than in the novel. He is one of the most essential characters in the overall plot, and in Virginia's mind, so I wanted his affect to be felt later on so that people couldn't cling to him from the onset and blame him for everything that subsequently happens.

Mrs. Bell was the most problematic character to write for, because she fostered an entirely separate set of complications and qualms. I struggled for a long time trying to figure out how the play should end, as the novel ends ambiguously and never states if it is Mrs. Bell or Virginia committing suicide, or whether the gun is shot. I knew ambiguity would be impossible to replicate on stage, so I had to make a choice about Mrs. Bell's character—was she real, or was she a projection of Virginia's mind? I decided to make her a projection, which meant that everything she said and did had to be carefully crafted and selected to fit that ideation. I wanted her to seem innocently crazy because she stands

for the masking of the true self—how no one would suspect her of having dark and demented thoughts if she acted and presented herself in a certain way. Throughout the play, Mrs. Bell subtly reveals her true self through dialogue, which is squished and squashed between piles of monologues about trivial endeavors—again, to demonstrate how she presents herself. She fabricates stories and characters (her daughters, for instance) to keep herself from acknowledging the truth and others from discovering the truth, specifically Virginia, to whom she does not entrust the truth until the final scene. Mrs. Bell is Virginia’s ultimate protector, crafted and projected by Virginia at a young age to cope with her volatile and disturbing surroundings.

The ending of play still needs work. Scene 8 has never settled with me. I would have much preferred a more subtle reveal, like the novel. If I could have sensibly achieved the novel’s ending, I would have, but I could not think of an adequate way to represent it. I also wasn’t sure how else I *could* end it—what more did Virginia need to do for the party? How much longer could she have kept up the charade? The intensity of Scene 8 is great, but I think I could have taken a much more artistic approach. It is unnecessary for Mrs. Bell to explain everything, which is something I will consider during the revision process of the play.

Again, the novel and the play are two completely distinct entities. While the characters maintain the same generalities from novel to play (name, physique, relationship), each has separate characteristics that disconnects them from their initial selves. Lenny, for instance, is much colder and distant in the play, and he exhibits a keen sense of anxiety not necessarily present in the novel. He seems much more innocent in

the novel, as if he were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Marvin reveals more about his true feelings for Virginia in the play, expressing that he may have once loved her but that those feelings are no longer relevant. In the novel, his feelings for her are assumed by Virginia—she actually has no idea how he once felt. Father is a much creepier presence in the play. He elicits more feelings of sadness in the novel, as his character seems more soft-spoken and reflective. April is arguably the most similar to her character in the novel, but that is because her character is only seen through Virginia's perspective in both cases, so she is naturally going to appear the same way. Mother has a similar presence to April in the novel, and the two are often linked in terms of characteristics and thoughts. In the play, Mother simply sits and watches the entire thing unfold without saying a word, which makes her a distant figure in Virginia's life as opposed to someone abrasive. Mrs. Bell is much more forward and desperate in the play, as she is constantly seeking friendship and companionship from Virginia. In the novel, she seems slightly more independent while still maintaining a clear and general feeling of unease. Virginia is more able to process Mrs. Bell's actions in the novel than in the play, which makes her slightly more understandable.

All in all, it amazes me how strikingly different the characters became, and how much I learned about them through the process of translating it. There are hidden motives and past events that sprouted up within each character that I had never thought of including in the novel, but these seem detrimental and essential in the play. There are bouts of dialogue in the play between April and Virginia and Lenny and Virginia that exceptionally exemplify her relationship with each of them, things that are simply

described and assumed by Virginia in the novel. She is physically controlled in the play, and mentally controlled in the novel, both of which result in her downfall but for seemingly different reasons.

As a whole, I prefer the novel to the play for aesthetic and sentimental reasons. There is something stringent and rapturous about prose that excites me, and I will always consider myself a novelist above anything else. However, I have written two pieces of fiction that can stand apart from each other despite having been born from the same seed, and that is a testament to the skill I have acquired as a writer during my time at the University of Maine. For that, I could not be more grateful.

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I. *The Party*

The Party

A Drama

D. Schrader

CAST

Virginia *middle-aged woman*

Mrs. Bell *older woman, neighbor of Virginia*

April *young woman, younger sister of
Virginia*

Marvin *middle-aged man, former lover of April*

Lenny *middle-aged man, husband of Virginia*

Father *older man, father of Virginia*

Mother *older woman, mother of Virginia*

NOTE: This play can be performed using the actors as the fence. If that is the case, disregard exiting and entering notations. Instead, have them rise from their positions and exit off-stage to change, then re-enter as their characters. The actors should be in stage blacks as the fence, and in costume as their characters.

Scene 1

December 3rd, 1982. Creamery Street. Morning. VIRGINIA's home. The stage is split, the larger portion being the inside, the other being the outside. The outside of the house is lit at the opening of the scene, the inside remains dark. A black iron fence borders the outside of the home. VIRGINIA exits the home, wearing a black peacoat, black gloves, black stockings.

(MRS BELL enters outside of VIRGINIA's home. She is wearing a pink robe and pink glasses, and her graying hair is tied back in a knot. She is holding a black cat in her arms, petting it aggressively.)

MRS BELL. Ginny! Ginny! *(Pause.)* I was just watching you from my window and waiting for you to come out. I knew it wouldn't be long before I saw you!

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Bell . . .

MRS BELL. Oh, it's so lovely to see you, dear. How are you? Leo and I are doing just fine. He's still sleeping, and I've been sifting through the morning paper with Topsy, haven't I, sweet-pea? *(Nuzzles cat.)* Yes, just waiting for Leo to wake up. It gets so lonely sometimes, waiting. I'm so glad I've got my kitties to keep me company. *(Pause.)* And where are you off to in such a hurry, might I ask? In *this* weather, of all times?

VIRGINIA. To the store . . . for some last minute things.

MRS BELL. Oh, do you need help with anything? I could—I could come along with you, or—or help shovel your car out of the driveway.

VIRGINIA. I don't drive in the winter.

MRS BELL. You don't drive in the winter? Nonsense! How else are you going to get to the store? Don't tell me you're going to walk in this freezing weather.

VIRGINIA. I just . . . I prefer walking.

MRS BELL. (*Persistently.*) How about I drive you? Leo wouldn't mind if I borrow his Pontiac.

VIRGINIA. No, no. I'm fine, actually. Just fine.

MRS BELL. Oh, that wouldn't be any trouble at all. We could shovel Leo's Pontiac out of the driveway and get to the store in no time.

VIRGINIA. I prefer walking, really.

MRS BELL. Not in this brutal weather, dear. No, I won't allow it. I should take you to the hospital to get checked. You must be crazy to enjoy walking in *this!* (*Laughs. Pause.*) Well, if you're not going to let me drive you then at least come inside for a hot cup of cocoa. You like cocoa, don't you? That sweet, sweet chocolate. I insist.

VIRGINIA. (*Pause.*) Just to the store. I'm hosting a party for my family tonight—it's my sister's birthday. There's going to be flowers and balloons and a cake and everything. I'm going to make a List, just in case . . . So I don't forget anything.

MRS BELL. Oh, I just hate that! Forgetting things. That's all I seem to do in my old age, forget, forget, forget . . . I swear, sometimes the days just sort of drift on by and I realize I've done nothing but watch out my window because I don't remember what I'd planned to do for Leo . . . Yes, just watching and waiting, staring . . . at least I have this lovely fence to look at . . .

VIRGINIA. Oh . . .

MRS BELL. It's such a lovely fence—though lovely is much too weak a word. It's stunning, brilliant . . . *immaculate*. Yes, I do believe *immaculate* is the proper word for this fence. So much detail, so much precision—I'm sure the neighbors would kill to have a fence this immaculate. They're all so envious of you. So sleek, dark, smooth. They all stare right at it. How could they *not*? You've got to be tender with such a fence, Ginny. (*Pause.*) Where did you get it? I'm sure you've told me at some point, but I forget, forget, forget . . .

VIRGINIA. (*Softly*) . . . Lenny built it.

MRS BELL. (*Shocked.*) He *built* it? With his own two hands? Well, I must say he's quite the craftsman! You've definitely found a keeper, Ginny. How is he doing? I'm sure he's doing just fine. He always seems to be. (*She leans in close to VIRGINIA.*) Hold on to him . . . with everything you have. (*Assumes a normal distance from VIRGINIA, starts a new conversation as if it's been going on for a while.*) Yes, if Leo was *half* the man Lenny was . . . I swear, it's like I'm not even there! I could be gabbing and gabbing, on and on and on, telling a beautiful story about something, *anything*—or asking him to fix the *goddamn* cupboards so they don't come crumbling down on top of me—you know, I tell him, I say “Listen, Leo, one of these days you're going to walk into the kitchen expecting to find a plate of sandwiches and a glass of milk for lunch, and instead, you're going to find my body buried beneath a pile of wood and fine china”—but do you think he listens? Do you think that image even *affects* him? No. Of course not. Maybe one day it will actually happen, and maybe he'll finally realize he should have listened to me all these years . . . (*Starting a new conversation, again, as if it's been going on for a while.*) Oh, yes, Ginny, they must be so pleased to have you as a daughter, throwing them a party and all. You are such a sweet daughter.

VIRGINIA. Not exactly a party, I mean. More like a small gathering. I've really got to be leaving if I'm going to be prepared . . .

MRS BELL. (*Petting Topsy.*) Oh, right. Are you sure you don't need help? I could help with the cleaning, the decorating, baking the cake—baking a cake isn't hard. Easy. Just dump the stuff in and stir. (*Pause.*) You . . . you are baking a cake, aren't you?

VIRGINIA. Yes. Chocolate. (*Pause.*) I just . . . I need to go if I'm going to get everything done in time.

MRS BELL. Oh, what time does the party start, dear?

VIRGINIA. Six o' clock. That gives me six hours to prepare . . .

MRS BELL. I see . . . well . . . would you mind if Leo and I came? You know, if he doesn't have anything planned for us. You can never tell with him. He's always planning something. Half the time he doesn't even tell me! Just gets right up, walks right out the door, down the drive, into the street—doesn't even say "Goodbye, honey! Be back later". (*Softer.*) Or maybe he does, I just forget . . . (*Pause.*) Tell you what, stop by after you're done shopping, that way I have time to run the whole thing by Leo, and to make sure I have time to bathe! That is . . . if you don't mind . . .

VIRGINIA. (*Thinking.*) I don't think I mind, no . . .

MRS BELL. Oh, that's just great! I was scared for a moment that you'd mind and then . . . well . . . you know . . . (*Pause.*) All right, dear. Well, I look forward to seeing you later today, and so does Leo, of course. That is if he doesn't leave. He's always doing that, always leaving. Hopefully you two will get to see each other.

VIRGINIA. Yes . . .

MRS BELL. *(Leaning in to VIRGINIA, again.)* Hold on to him, Ginny. I mean it. You can't afford not to. *(Leaning out.)* See you soon, Ginny! Be careful out there on the ice. You never know when it's going to snag your feet, trip you upside down. You can never be too careful. *(Leaves, petting cat.)*

(MARVIN enters from the staircase, carrying shopping bags full of groceries. He is wearing a brown button-up with the sleeves rolled up and tan pants. He exits offstage and returns moments later with a shopping cart with the grocery bags in it. He leaves the cart near VIRGINIA, then crosses to the other side of the kitchen and stands watching VIRGINIA.)

(End of Scene 1)

Scene 2

Inside VIRGINIA's home. There is a small kitchen with an island, a dining table seated for five, and a flowery chair facing out a window near the entrance. A staircase near the entrance leads to a second story. A green, wooden, heart-shaped clock ticks on the wall. A blue phone hangs on the wall in the kitchen, and a brown CD player sits on one of the counters. VIRGINIA enters through the front door, struggling to push the shopping cart through the threshold. The cart contains a carton of eggs, a half gallon of milk, confectioners' sugar, butter, evaporated milk, cocoa, vanilla extract, a bag of sugar, a bag of flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, vegetable oil, balloons, streamers, cheese and cracker platter, chips, drinks.

(VIRGINIA pushes the cart downstage into the kitchen. She strips off her outerwear and hangs it on the coat rack near the front door. She is wearing a black knee-length bathrobe. She begins to unpack the cart, sifting slowly through the items and placing each one onto the counter gingerly, leaving everything that is not a cake ingredient. Once she has the ingredients laid out, she stares confusedly at them, as if she doesn't know how they go together. She takes a pair of scissors from the drawer and snips open the bags. Then she finds mixing bowls, mixing spoons, and measuring cups in the cupboards and lines them up along the counter, a distinct divide between ingredients and tools.)

(MARVIN pulls a piece of paper from his pocket. VIRGINIA does not see him. There is a long pause before he says anything. Hesitantly, he speaks.)

MARVIN. Ginny.

(VIRGINIA drops what she's holding and turns. Their eyes meet. For a moment she is pleased, then immediately she goes cold and looks away from him entirely. Then she pivots halfway back, her expression simple.)

VIRGINIA. Marvin. It's you.

MARVIN. It's me. I thought you could use some help. *(He crosses to her, extending the piece of paper out to her. It dangles in front of her for a beat.)* It's a List . . . you know, so you don't forget what to do . . . *(He ogles the kitchen, the ingredients and bowls and cups.)* That is what you needed, right?

VIRGINIA. *(Semi-frozen, stiff.)* . . . Yes.

MARVIN. Good. *(Pause.)* Because otherwise all that time I spent making the List would have been wasted. Could you imagine? *(He walks over to the island and puts The List on the counter, then begins fumbling with a few of the ingredients.)* You must have bought half the store . . . who is this cake for?

VIRGINIA. *(Uncomfortable with him touching her ingredients.)* April.

MARVIN. *(He pauses, the name striking a chord.)* Oh . . . her . . . birthday, that's right! Today's the third, isn't it? Are you throwing her a party or something?

VIRGINIA. Small, family party, yes.

MARVIN. I've lost all track of time, lately. See, Sylvia and I are on vacation and . . . well . . . you know how that goes. Otherwise, I would have realized it was April's birthday sooner, of course.

VIRGINIA. Just for her and my parents. That's all.

MARVIN. It's so hard to remember which day is which when you don't have a schedule. The days just sort of drift on by.

VIRGINIA. Nothing too fancy.

MARVIN. And you start to forget about reality for a while, which can be such a good thing . . . *(Quieter, almost as if VIRGINIA isn't supposed to hear.)* Bad, too. *(Pause, then a snap back to the cake.)* Here, let me help you.

VIRGINIA. No, Marvin. I'm fine.

MARVIN. Honestly, it's no problem.

VIRGINIA. Really, I'm fine.

MARVIN. I want to help you, Ginny.

VIRGINIA. I said I'm fine, Marvin. Really.

MARVIN. Well, if you're not going to let me help you with the cake, then at least let me put the rest of your things away. *(He starts for the carton of eggs.)*

VIRGINIA. *Please*, don't touch those!

MARVIN. *(Staring at the egg carton in his hands.)* What? These?

VIRGINIA. Yes. Those. Please, put them back. Don't touch anything.

MARVIN. Oh, come on, Ginny. What's so wrong with me trying to help you? Is it really going to harm you if I put the eggs in the fridge where they belong?

VIRGINIA. I . . . I . . .

MARVIN. Just let me do this one thing for you, Ginny, and I promise I won't touch anything else. I promise. *(He starts for the fridge, cradling the carton of eggs like a baby. His steps are slow, methodical. As he reaches the door of the fridge, VIRGINIA lunges at him.)*

VIRGINIA. *(Yelling.)* Put them back, dammit! *(She tugs at the eggs, ensuing a tug-of-war like sequence between the two.)* I said put them back!

(With a forceful tug, the carton of eggs flings to the floor, and it is not apparent whose arms are responsible. A few eggs roll out of the carton, and two eggs break on contact. VIRGINIA and MARVIN freeze, looking at what they've done. Then, MARVIN starts collecting the loose eggs and putting them back into the carton. VIRGINIA remains locked in her position, unable to move.)

MARVIN. I'm sorry . . . I . . . I didn't mean to . . . the eggs.

VIRGINIA. They're broken.

MARVIN. Yes.

VIRGINIA. You broke them.

MARVIN. *(Hesitant.)* Well—

VIRGINIA. You broke the eggs, my eggs . . . the eggs I was going to use for April's cake.

MARVIN. I'm sorry, Ginny. It was an accident.

VIRGINIA. Now they're ruined. Don't you see that? Ruined. They're cracked and leaking. They're useless, thanks to you.

MARVIN. I know. I didn't mean to . . .

VIRGINIA. Well, you did.

MARVIN. *(Pause.)* You've still got the others. *(He grabs the carton of eggs and holds it out to her. She stares at it, but doesn't take it. He puts it on the counter with the other ingredients.)*

VIRGINIA. It's not the same. I don't want the *other* eggs, I want *those* eggs, the ones you broke. And now I can't have them.

MARVIN. There's nothing wrong with the other ten eggs, Ginny. You can use those ones, the cake will come out the same.

VIRGINIA. No it won't! The eggs are different, all the eggs are different . . . it doesn't matter. You've broken them and that's all there is to it.

MARVIN. I didn't mean—

VIRGINIA. Can we please just drop it?

(Pause.)

MARVIN. *(Looking at The List.)* Baking a cake isn't hard. Easy. *(Starting to measure out the flour, but hesitating.)* Anybody can do it. Just dump the stuff in and stir . . .

VIRGINIA. I know. I know how easy it'll be. *(Pause.)* I . . . I can do it myself.

MARVIN. But that wouldn't be nearly as good. You know that. Come on, help me. I want you to help me.

VIRGINIA. No . . . I can't. Please, just . . . just go.

MARVIN. Hold on, Ginny. I can't just go.

VIRGINIA. Why not?

MARVIN. Because I've got something to tell you. *(Pause.)* I wasn't going to tell you. Now that I think of it—I don't know what it will do to you. But I'm here, and it's been, what, a *year* since we last saw each other, and I think it's a good time. And I'm happy about it, dammit! I'm so happy about it. Sylvia and I . . . we're expecting a baby!

VIRGINIA. A . . . *baby*?

MARVIN. Yes! A baby! Oh, Ginny can you believe it? Me, a father! I've been waiting to become a father for so long now, and—

VIRGINIA. You're *really* having a baby?

MARVIN. *(Pause.)* Yes, Ginny. I'm *really* having a baby. Do you have a problem with me and Sylvia having a baby?

VIRGINIA. No . . . No, I'm happy for you and Sylvia. *(She turns away from him.)*

MARVIN. Look, I'm sorry, Ginny. I—I know this is hard for you to hear, but . . . well, these things happen. It was bound to happen eventually, I mean.

VIRGINIA. *(Still turned away.)* I know. I just . . .

MARVIN. What, Ginny?

VIRGINIA. *(Pause. She turns back to face him.)* I just can't help but think that it could have been . . .

MARVIN. April's.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* April's . . . Yes, April's.

MARVIN. Well, you're wrong. What April and I had was fun, yes, but that's all it was. Sylvia and I connect on a much more emotional level. I love her, Ginny. More than I ever thought I could love another person. Having a baby with April . . . well, it wouldn't have felt . . . *right*.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* And this does?

MARVIN. Ginny, I've never felt so strongly about anything in my life. I feel like I'm finally going somewhere, like I'm finally amounting to something. This baby, this beautiful baby, is *right* for me, right for *us*. April and I . . . we just weren't meant to be.

(A long pause settles between them. VIRGINIA does not make eye contact with MARVIN, despite his attempts to connect with her. He cannot read her emotions in the silence.)

MARVIN. I should go. Sylvia's probably waiting for me. *(As he turns to leave, he remembers something. Reaching into his pocket, he pulls out a pack of cigarettes and places it on the counter.)* I brought these for you. You know . . . just in case. I know how much you used to like to smoke. I hope you still do. Maybe you don't. I don't know. *(He exits up the stairs.)*

(End of Scene 2)

Scene 3

VIRGINIA stands still. Then, anger engulfs her. She slams her fists on the counter.

VIRGINIA. DAMN HIM!

(VIRGINIA spots the pack of cigarettes on the counter. She picks it up, toys with it in her hands. After a pause, she slams the box down on the counter and walks away from it. After another pause, she returns to the ingredients. She preheats the oven, then greases a baking pan. She starts measuring out the ingredients into the bowl, being rough and loud with them still obviously affected by MARVIN. MARVIN returns from the staircase, this time with APRIL in a blond wig, a yellow shirt, and a pale-yellow skirt. He is pulling her by the hand, and brings her to the kitchen. VIRGINIA does not see them, and wipes her brow with her forearm, starting to sweat.)

(In front of the counter, MARVIN and APRIL kiss passionately. MARVIN lifts APRIL up onto the counter next to VIRGINIA, still passionately kissing APRIL. APRIL begins to unbutton MARVIN's shirt. VIRGINIA still does not see MARVIN or APRIL.)

MARVIN. Oh, Sylvia . . . baby . . .

(The two moan, huff, grunt, and thrust on the counter, "oh, baby", "baby, yes", "yes, baby". VIRGINIA is oblivious, too occupied with the recipe and ingredients. While they are moaning, VIRGINIA grabs the eggs.)

MARVIN. *(Amidst the groaning, he looks up and directs his attention to VIRGINIA.)* I didn't mean to break your eggs.

(VIRGINIA cracks the eggs into the bowl. She pulls out a wooden spoon from the drawer and plunges it into the bowl. She begins to mix the ingredients together,

stirring in tight circles. As she does this, APRIL wraps her legs around MARVIN'S waist, pulling him in close. The "baby" moaning continues throughout.)

MARVIN. *Baby . . . feels . . . so . . . right! (Pause.) You . . . beautiful baby . . . (Pause.) You've still got the others . . . there's nothing wrong with the others.*

(MARVIN and APRIL come to a climax, then settle into heavy breathing. VIRGINIA finishes mixing the ingredients, then examines the contents of the bowl.)

MARVIN. Should have been April's . . .

(MARVIN and APRIL head to the stairs, MARVIN pulling her as he did when they entered, both of them staring at VIRGINIA the entire time. They pause at the foot of the staircase.)

MARVIN. I love her, Ginny. More than I ever thought I could love another person.

(They exit up the stairs.)

(VIRGINIA transfers the batter from the bowl to the tray. She is clearly dissatisfied with how it looks. She sticks it in the oven to bake. She stands a moment, realizing how quiet it is around her. She goes to the CD player and hits "play". Mozart's Requiem in D Minor begins.

She closes her eyes, lets the music seep into her skin. Her body starts swaying slightly to the rhythm of the strings. Her hands raise, as if she's orchestrating the music herself. Then, APRIL's voice is heard offstage.)

APRIL'S VOICE. ARE YOU *FUCKING* KIDDING ME? *(She bounds down the stairs, wearing a green t-shirt, a green skirt, and green knee-high socks. Her hair is in a sideways pony.)* Again with that Mozart *SHIT*?

(VIRGINIA's trance-like state stops. APRIL stands upstage of VIRGINIA.)

APRIL. God, how many times do I have to tell you? Mozart's. Not. Cool. It's like you're trying to be retarded or something. *(After a pause.)* Helloooooo? Ginitals? I'm talking to you!

VIRGINIA. *(Hesitant.)* What, April?

APRIL. Are you actually listening to that dumb classical shit?

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* Yes . . . and . . .

APRIL. You know Mom couldn't stand that shit. I swear, it's like you wanted her to hate you. *(Pause.)* So are you going to turn it off, or should I do it for you? It's giving me a migraine. *(Goes over to the CD player and turns it off. Then, she spots the cake ingredients lying out and the shopping cart full of decorations.)* Oh. You're throwing me a party. What, did your last party not ruin my life enough? *(She digs precariously through the cart.)* I see you didn't get me any flowers. You bought half the *goddamn* store and didn't even buy me one *decent* thing . . . you really are going for round-two of ruin April's life, aren't you? Please tell me the cake's chocolate, at least.

VIRGINIA. It is. *(Pause.)* And . . . I'm going to be getting the flowers later, I just forgot—

APRIL. Good. I deserve at *least* that, don't you think? Make sure they're roses. White—my favorite. And throw in some tulips and hydrangeas while you're at it. I don't think that's too much to ask, considering . . .

VIRGINIA. No . . . no it's not, not at all.

APRIL. You'll find some way to screw the whole thing up. Do you honestly, truthfully think that when Mom comes walking through the front door she'll be expecting some extravagant evening with perfect decor and . . . *(going to the cart)* little cheese platters? *(She picks up a platter and drops it to the floor. The cheese scatters.)* Because she won't be. You'll be lucky if she even comes. I'm sure she won't. You're just so pathetic. Not even Dad could say otherwise.

VIRGINIA. *(Panicked, she falls to her knees to clean up the cheese.)* I . . . I know.

APRIL. God, I just wish you'd stop fooling yourself into thinking you're this *grand, higher being* who listens to *Mozart* and thinks it *speaks to her*. It makes me sick. You're nothing, Ginitals. You're nothing, just like the rest of us. And the sooner you realize that, the less of a retard you'll be.

(Long pause. VIRGINIA continues to gather bits of cheese from the floor. When she finishes, she gets to her feet slowly.)

APRIL. *(In a softer tone, different than before.)* He was mine, you know? He was mine. And you—you—you just *ripped* him from me. I was gonna fix him with time . . . I was gonna make it work. Maybe that's why we all despise you. You just *ruin* everything.

VIRGINIA. I'm—I'm sorry, April.

APRIL. *(Sneering.)* Yeah? And what good does that do me? God, you're pathetic. You think an apology and a measly party is going to fix everything? Is that what you think? It's not. It's just *fucking* not. *(Spotting the cigarettes.)* And you're smoking again? Mom's gonna kill you. You know she can smell that shit from a mile away; there's no way you can hide it from her. You never could. You really are a mess, aren't you?

VIRGINIA. I just . . . *(Pause.)* Why are you here?

APRIL. What, are you trying to kick me out of my own party? Am I not allowed to check-in to see how it's going?

VIRGINIA. It's not that, it's just . . . I've got a lot to do and not a lot of time.

APRIL. Well, ruining my life doesn't take that long. It never has with you. *(She walks over to the green heart-shaped clock and pulls it off the wall.)* I just came to borrow this. You'll get it back sometime.

VIRGINIA. But—

APRIL. Shut up. You won't be needing it. *(Pause.)* What time is the stupid party at?

VIRGINIA. Six.

APRIL. Maybe I'll have time to come . . . maybe I won't. *(Heading toward the stairs.)* Good luck with that shitty cake. And I hope those cigarettes taste real sweet. And, God, do you ever clean up? This place is a fucking pig-sty. I bet Mom is so proud to have you as a daughter. *(She goes up the stairs, then comes back down.)* Don't forget the flowers. I deserve them, Ginitals. Don't fucking forget them. *(She exits up the stairs.)*

(VIRGINIA picks up the box of cigarettes. She desperately tries to open the pack, then stops as if she's convinced herself otherwise. Angrily, she throws the box at the staircase. Pause. She rushes to pick it up, then cradles it apologetically. She returns it to the counter, then takes The List from it and scans it over. She puts it in her pocket, then begins frantically cleaning and putting things away. Then, she goes to the CD

player, wanting to press “play” but remembering APRIL’s comments. She is visibly torn between playing the music and remaining in silence to appease APRIL.)

(MRS BELL, in a pink jacket, knocks on the front door before VIRGINIA can make a decision. VIRGINIA jumps in shock at the noise.)

(End of Scene 3)

Scene 4

MRS BELL. *(At the front door.)* Ginny! Ginny, dear! Would you mind letting me in? It's awfully cold out here. *(Knocking again.)* Ginny! Ginny! Can you hear me? I don't want to be out here all by myself!

(VIRGINIA goes to the front door.)

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Bell? What are you doing here? *(She lets MRS BELL in.)*

MRS BELL. *(She enters, taking off her jacket.)* Oh, am I not allowed to check-in to see how it's going? I was actually worried you would forget to stop by, and I saw you from my window lugging this giant contraption—*(spotting the shopping cart)* OH! That's what that was! A shopping cart, of course!—and I knew I had to rush right over to check out what all the commotion was about. *(Lower, softer tone.)* Although . . . I did get side-tracked for a bit . . . *(Back to a normal tone.)* My, something smells sweet as can be! Are you baking, dear? *(She puts her jacket over VIRGINIA's coat on the coat rack.)*

VIRGINIA. Yes. A cake for my sister . . . it's her birthday. I—I thought I told you . . .

MRS BELL. Oh, I'm sure you did at one point or another, but you know me . . . *forget, forget, forget. (Chuckles.)* I swear, sometimes I end up feeding my kitties four, five, *six* times a day because I can't remember if I've fed them or not. Although they certainly don't seem to mind!

(VIRGINIA crosses to the kitchen. She takes a rag and wipes down the counters.)

MRS BELL. I'm just two shy of a dozen now. The one I had earlier today, Topsy—he's the one I've had the longest. I'm not too keen on his name, but I suppose

that's what I get for letting Leo name him. I thank the Lord he didn't name our two children. He probably would have gone with Agnes and Vespa! Ha! Could you imagine?

VIRGINIA. (*Looking up from her cleaning.*) Your two children?

MRS BELL. Yes, my two children. My two, beautiful babies. Well, of course they're all grown up now . . .

VIRGINIA. Oh . . . I just, I didn't know you had any children, Mrs. Bell.

MRS BELL. What? Of course I do! They're my two prized possessions. Victoria is the oldest, the first born. Alice is the second, such a beautiful young daughter—I always told her she should go into modeling. Oh, and you should see the paintings she's made! Such an artist. She's got a gift, I tell you. A real, God-given gift. Certainly I've gabbed on and on and on about them before.

VIRGINIA. (*Pause.*) Yes, I'm sure you have Mrs. Bell, now that I think of it. I must have just forgotten . . . Yes. My mind is cluttered from the party and all . . .

MRS BELL. Oh, that's right. The *party*, yes. Well, good thing I popped in or I'm sure I would have forgotten about the whole thing. (*Walking over to the cart.*) Are these all your decorations?

VIRGINIA. Not all. I'm buying flowers too.

MRS BELL. (*Digging through the cart.*) Flowers, too? My, I must say, Ginny, you really are as sweet as they come. I mean, look at all this! You must have bought half the store!

VIRGINIA. Yes . . .

MRS BELL. And good heavens, what have you done to the cheese platter? You better arrange that nicely before the party, of course. (*Suddenly, she stops pawing through the cart and looks at VIRGINIA. Then, she walks incredibly close to her, nearly squishing her face into VIRGINIA's.*) Good thing you're already baking the cake. Baking a cake isn't hard. Easy.

VIRGINIA. (*Angry.*) I know how *damn easy* it must be!

MRS BELL. (*Stepping back.*) Excuse me, dear? What are you saying? How easy *what* must be?

VIRGINIA. The *cake!* That goddamn cake!

MRS BELL. I'm—I'm so sorry, dear . . . I just don't know what you're talking about. Where is this coming from?

VIRGINIA. You! You just told me how *easy* baking a cake must be.

MRS BELL. I . . . I *did*?

VIRGINIA. You *didn't*?

MRS BELL. I didn't! I said: Well, how long does a party really take to prepare for? Nothing about how hard it is, dear.

VIRGINIA. (*Pause.*) And . . . and you're sure you're not lying to me?

MRS BELL. I'm sorry, dear. Truly I am. But I said nothing about how hard it is. . . I promise you, Ginny, I didn't. Perhaps the party *is* getting to you a bit . . .

VIRGINIA. (*Long pause.*) You're right. The party.

MRS BELL. I see that's a sensitive subject for you. I understand. It means you care a lot about it. That's not a bad thing, Ginny.

VIRGINIA. I *need* it to be perfect. For April.

MRS BELL. Well, coming from someone as sweet as you, I'm sure it will be. Although it looks like you've got your hands full with these decorations . . . do you need any help with anything?

VIRGINIA. No. I'm fine.

MRS BELL. Really, I can do whatever it is you need.

VIRGINIA. I'm fine, really.

MRS BELL. Or better yet, have Lenny help you! You could surely use a nice, strong man to help you string things up on the walls. Where is he anyway? He should be down here helping you.

VIRGINIA. He's . . . out.

MRS BELL. *Out!*? He's *out* on a day like today? Don't tell me he's out driving in this god-awful weather. I barely made it down my front steps without slipping on ice. It just snags your feet, trips you upside down!

VIRGINIA. He's not driving.

MRS BELL. Oh, thank goodness. At least *he* knows better. Do you think my husband listens to me when I tell him not to go out in a snow storm? *No!* Of

course he doesn't. You know, I went upstairs earlier to check on him—he'd been sleeping for an awfully long time, and I had to check on him, you know, just in case—anyway, I went upstairs and he was *gone*! He up and left! And Heaven only knows where he could have gone. I'm assuming he went to visit one of the girls—he'd been mentioning driving out to see one of them recently—but I honestly didn't think he'd do it *today*! Oh, I hate that! Don't you hate that?

VIRGINIA. I suppose I would, yes, if that happened to me.

MRS BELL. Oh, I bet Lenny is a wonderful listener. He always struck me as the type who really, really cares about other people like that.

VIRGINIA. Yes . . .

MRS BELL. I still remember when you two lovebirds moved into the neighborhood. I had been watching out the window, watering my plants in the windowsill, because, Lord knows, I could never get Leo to touch anything of the sort, and I saw you two standing by the mailbox, holding hands, pecking each other on the cheeks. It was adorable. It brought me back to those first years with Leo, how romantic he'd been with me. He used to love kissing my neck in public, and he'd take me out to all those fancy restaurants like in the movies. Anyway, I kept watching you two because, naturally, I was suspicious. I couldn't tell what you were doing standing outside someone's house kissing and all. But then I saw the moving truck come swerving into the driveway and everything *clicked*. I was going to have new neighbors! I yelled up to Leo, though I doubt he even heard me, then rushed outside to introduce myself, because what kind of neighbor would I be if I hadn't? *(Pause)* Do you remember that? When I came and introduced myself? I probably scared you a little, didn't I?

VIRGINIA. No . . . you weren't scary . . .

MRS BELL. Oh, really? You're not lying? You didn't think I was scary? Oh, that's wonderful to hear because I actually thought *oh no! I've scared them off on their first day in their new home*. I'm glad I wasn't scary, then. I was . . . I was just so happy to have new neighbors, to see fresh faces walking around the neighborhood. The ones we have now aren't particularly the friendliest of people. (*Getting closer to VIRGINIA.*) You know, I heard Mr. Johnson up the road has a basement *filled to the brim* with guns and ammunition, just in case an apocalypse happens. And I heard his wife Margaret makes him stock up on canned goods and everything. What kind of person actually *prepares* for an apocalypse, let alone *believes* in it? (*Pause.*) That's why I only let Leo have one gun. I don't need him parading around here preaching about an apocalypse and threatening to kill people! He keeps the gun under lock and key. He and I are the only ones who know where it is. (*Pause.*) You know . . . just in case. (*Regaining composure.*) Yes, I just wish Leo listened to me more. But I suppose he just wants his *man time*, and I can't blame him for that. Does Lenny need his *man time*, too? I'm sure every man does to an extent, right?

VIRGINIA. He did, yes, but . . . umm . . .

MRS BELL. What is it, dear?

VIRGINIA. Well . . . he's . . . umm . . . Lenny's *dead*.

MRS BELL. No! Lenny . . . ? *Dead?* (*Long silence.*) I'm so sorry, Ginny. When did this happen to you?

VIRGINIA. A year ago . . . in a . . . a car crash.

MRS BELL. I don't know what to say, Ginny. Here I was, asking you about your husband . . . I should have been more considerate, I—

VIRGINIA. It's fine. You didn't remember.

MRS BELL. Well, actually, I didn't *know* . . .

VIRGINIA. I'd really rather not talk about it, if you don't mind. Let's just not talk about it.

(Silence. VIRGINIA grabs The List, gripping it tightly. MRS. BELL looks lost, trying to fill the silence.)

MRS BELL. Why don't . . . why don't we go . . . get those flowers, now? The ones for April. I'll go with you.

VIRGINIA. No, really. I'm fine to go alone.

MRS BELL. Oh no, Ginny. It's no bother at all. Just let me go back home real quick to grab my mittens and . . . and my purse. Oh, and I completely forgot to feed the kitties. Or did I? Either way, I'm sure they've been missing me this whole time. *(Putting her jacket on.)* I knew I shouldn't have left them home alone this long. Yes, I'll just run home real quick, and you stay right here. I won't be more than six minutes.

VIRGINIA. Wait. Just wait.

MRS BELL. *(Turning to face VIRGINIA.)* Why? For what, Ginny? I'll be right back.

VIRGINIA. I know, just . . .

MRS BELL. Come on, Ginny. I have to hurry. My kitties need me. I won't be long.

VIRGINIA. Hold on, please. I have to tell you—

MRS BELL. *What? What is wrong with you?*

(Pause. VIRGINIA stares at The List.)

MRS BELL. Like I said, I'll be back sometime . . . You just wait here. *(She exits.)*

(Silence. VIRGINIA continues to stare at The List. The stove rings, startling her. She puts The List back down on the counter. She rushes to the stove.)

VIRGINIA. Oh, *damn!* I forgot the cake. *(She puts on oven mitts and pulls the cake out. It is beautiful, perfectly cooked. She places it on the counter. She inspects it.)* It just looks so fragile. *(She pokes it.)* One poke and it could . . . collapse. No, I don't think this will do. It needs to be better, for April. This will never do. *(She picks up the tray with the cake.)* And I could make another one, I think. I don't really need this one. No, not really. This was my first attempt. I could do so much better . . . so much better than this one. *(She holds the cake tray over the trash can. Pause. She flips the cake into the trash.)* Yes. I'll show them how easy it was. I'll make an even better one next time, since it's so easy. Then they'll really know how easy it was. How damn, *damn* easy it was.

(End of Scene 4)

Scene 5

APRIL enters from the staircase cradling a green vase of flowers like a baby. There are four white roses, four yellow tulips, and four pink hydrangeas in the vase. She places the flowers on the dining table. While VIRGINIA begins feverishly prepping another cake mix, APRIL pulls one of the white roses from the vase and stares at it, admiring it.

APRIL. Don't forget to make the fucking frosting . . . that sweet, sweet fucking frosting . . .

(VIRGINIA pours the cake mix into a baking tray, then slides it into the oven. APRIL starts to exit up the stairs with the white rose. Then, she turns to VIRGINIA.)

APRIL. You better fucking hurry up, Ginitals . . . You don't have much time . . . They'll be here soon. Them. The others. Me, Father, Mother . . . why did you invite her? You really shouldn't have. You know how she feels about you. What a fucking mistake . . . *(She exits up the stairs.)*

(VIRGINIA takes The List from her pocket, scans it, then puts it on the counter. She adds one stick of butter, two-thirds cup of dark cocoa powder, three cups of powdered sugar, one teaspoon of milk, and one teaspoon of vanilla extract into a blue bowl. Just as she begins to mix the ingredients together, the blue corded phone on the wall rings. As she picks up the phone, FATHER enters from the alcove of the house near the front door, where a bathroom would be. He is wearing a blue overcoat, a dark blue undershirt, and dark blue pants. He is holding and talking into a blue phone. He stays near the front door, at first. VIRGINIA does not notice him.)

VIRGINIA. Hello?

FATHER. (*Slurring his speech throughout, drunkenly.*) Hi, Gin. How's ev'rything?

VIRGINIA. Oh, hello Father. Just trying to bake a cake . . . for the party.

FATHER. I didn't mean to bother you, I—

VIRGINIA. You're not bothering me. You're fine.

FATHER. (*Pause. He takes a few steps downstage.*) God, you sound tired.

VIRGINIA. (*Stirring the mix.*) I am. I am tired.

FATHER. Well, is it—is it really *that* hard to, to, to bake a *cake*? Oh, Gin, you know—you know I'm joking, right? Lighten up. It's a, it's a, it's a cake. As long as it tastes good. It's a really, really sweet thing you're doing for, for April.

VIRGINIA. (*More aggressive with her mixing.*) Yes, as long as it tastes good . . . I know you're not calling just to tell me how sweet I'm being. Is something the matter?

FATHER. That's just like ya, Gin. Never—never taking the time for small talk. Jump straight to the prob—to the problem. (*He walks closer to VIRGINIA. He is now in the kitchen area with her. His voice sinks to a whisper.*) Do you, do you remember when you, when you were just a little girl . . . oh, we had some good, good times, didn't we? I could make you laugh just by . . . just by rubbing your belly. (*He gets a little closer to her.*) We don't—we don't do that anymore. How come, Gin? How come, how come we don't do that anymore?

VIRGINIA. (*She puts the mixing spoon down.*) We're too old, that's why. (*Pause.*) Why are you calling me? There must be *some* reason.

FATHER. (*Closer still.*) And, and you used to sit—you used to sit right in my lap—and I'd read you a bedtime story . . . then you'd fall asleep, and I'd have to take you to your room . . .

VIRGINIA. Yes, Father. I remember all of those things, but I really don't see what it has to do with anything.

FATHER. (*Practically in VIRGINIA's ear.*) Then, then I'd whisper to you, so soft, so they wouldn't hear, *you're my favorite, Gin. You're my favorite.* Do you, do you, do you remember that, Gin? Do you? (*Pause. VIRGINIA does not respond.*) And you know, you know what, Gin? It's, it's all still true. You're still my favorite . . . did you know that, too? (*Pause.*) I miss you, Gin.

VIRGINIA. I miss you, too.

FATHER. (*Pulling away slightly.*) You're . . . you're the only one who understood me, you, you know that? The *only* one. Not, not them, not any of them, just you. Always you. (*Pause. He pulls away even more.*) And as much as I wish I could say I don't love your mother, I can't. I still love her, Gin. Her beautiful blond hair . . . those eyes . . . Even though she was a raving *bitch* who left me, who left me, who left me with nothing. I still love her, Gin . . . It's terrible. It's all so terrible.

VIRGINIA. (*Pause.*) I know.

FATHER. I could have, I could have done more, Gin. I could have done so much more . . . it's all my fault.

VIRGINIA. It's not. It's not your fault . . .

FATHER. It's true. You all, you all think it . . . it's true. *I screwed up. I made her leave. Me, me, me! (Pause.)* But it's, it's okay, Gin. It's okay. Ev'rything's okay, now. *(Pause.)* You aren't talking much. Why, why aren't you talking much?

VIRGINIA. I don't know. I'm . . . I'm tired, like I said.

FATHER. *Tired?* From, from what?

VIRGINIA. I'm baking a cake.

FATHER. You are? *(Pause.)* Oh right. You told me that. I think you told me that. Didn't you tell me that? I can't, I can't remember . . . I forget . . .

VIRGINIA. I did, yes. I told you that. For April.

FATHER. *(Stepping closer to VIRGINIA.)* Oh, that's really, really a sweet thing you're doing for April. You're such a sweet daughter, Gin. Did you, did you know that? So, so sweet.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* Father, why are you calling? Is there any reason?

FATHER. What? Can't a father call his daughter without a reason?

VIRGINIA. I guess you can. Yes.

FATHER. I just . . . I just wanted to hear your voice is all. *(Pause.)* I miss you, Gin. I miss you.

VIRGINIA. I know you do. I know.

FATHER. *(He walks back to the kitchen.)* You're so sweet, Gin. *(He sticks his finger in the frosting, pulls it out, and sticks it in his mouth.)* The sweetest. *(Pause.)* I wish things could have been better . . . But they weren't. They just weren't. *(Silence.)*
HMMMM . . . So sweet.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* I have to go now. I've got . . . a lot to do.

FATHER. Oh, right . . . for the party . . . It was good to hear your voice. I'll see you tonight, Gin.

(FATHER hangs up his phone and exits, leaving from where he came. VIRGINIA hangs up the phone. There is a long silence. Then, she picks up the cigarettes.)

VIRGINIA. I could do it. I could smoke one right now . . . I could—I could just . . . open the window. I could open the window and blow the smoke right out. That's what I could do. *(She opens the window above the sink. Then, she unwraps the cigarettes and pulls one out, gazing at it. She examines it for a moment, then sticks the butt in her mouth. She clearly enjoys the feeling, the taste. Then, she changes her mind.)* Although . . . Surely Mother and April would smell it on me regardless. They always could. And it's cold. *(Pause.)* And I told myself I would wait. Until the party is all set . . . Then I'll do it. Then I'll have one. Yes, then I'll have one.

(She puts the cigarette back in its box, then puts the box back on the counter. Pause. She goes to the cart and unpacks the balloons, streamers, cheese and cracker platter, chips, and drinks, placing them on the counter. She stares at them a moment, confused. As VIRGINIA opens up the balloons and streamers, APRIL comes down the stairs. Her hair is tied in a bun. She is wearing a green dress. Much more formal than her first attire.)

APRIL. It is his fault, you know. All of it. *He* did this to us.

(VIRGINIA ignores APRIL. She continues to open up the balloons and streamers, laying them out across the table.)

APRIL. *He broke our family, Ginitals. He fucking broke us.*

(VIRGINIA starts to blow up a pink balloon.)

APRIL. You can't keep pretending that he didn't. You can't! He fucking broke our family. He never really loved us . . . He never really loved *you*.

(VIRGINIA finishes blowing up the pink balloon.)

APRIL. Will you *fucking* listen to me? *(She takes a bobby pin from her hair and pops the balloon. Its fragments litter the ground.)* Why won't you fucking listen to me, Ginitals? I'm trying to talk to you and you just stand there, not saying a goddamn *fucking* thing! What is wrong with you?

VIRGINIA. *(Softly.)* He did love us.

APRIL. Are you *fucking* insane? You actually think that's true? *(Pause.)* Why the fuck are you so dumb?

VIRGINIA. You just never tried to understand him . . .

APRIL. *Understand* him? Why the *hell* should I be the one trying to *understand* him? I'm not about to have compassion for the man who broke our family. I'm not!

VIRGINIA. He didn't mean to . . .

APRIL. Then what *did* he mean to do? God, you're just as pathetic as him. No wonder he liked you best. Always has. Always will.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry . . .

APRIL. I don't fucking care *what* you are. It doesn't change what's happened. *(Pause.)* God, it's fucking freezing in here. Shut the goddamn window, will you? God, I can't handle you sometimes . . . *(She spots the flowers on the table. She goes over to them.)* Are these the flowers? You actually managed to get flowers? *(Inspecting them. She toys with the petals of the yellow tulips.)* I guess they're okay looking. I've seen better. I like the way they're shaped . . . like an "M" . . . oh, and you got white roses—my favorite. Good. That's what I deserve. *(On her way up the stairs. Pause.)* He was mine. And you just ripped him from me. *Mine. Mine. Mine.* *(She exits.)*

(End of Scene 5)

Scene 6

VIRGINIA goes to the flowery chair facing out the window near the front door and sits in it, unrelaxed. Pause. She gazes out the window.

VIRGINIA. I know he was *hers*. I know that. I know that.

(MARVIN comes down the stairs unnoticed, and lurks in the alcove near the front door. He watches her watching out the window. Then, he walks over to the CD player and presses “play”. Lacrimosa begins. VIRGINIA’s eyes close. She rises from the chair mechanically, then starts to dance as if with a partner. She smiles, imagining something.)

VIRGINIA. Lenny . . .

(MARVIN steps closer and closer to her until they are nearly touching. He sways in the direction she sways. Slowly, he puts his hands on her waist, and her hands find the back of his neck.)

VIRGINIA. It’s you. *(Her eyes remain closed.)*

(As they dance, LENNY enters outside. He is wearing a gray jacket, a white shirt, and gray pants. He is holding a bag. He puts it down near the fence, and then examines the fence for a while. Inside, VIRGINIA giggles, growing closer and closer to MARVIN.)

VIRGINIA. I’ve forgotten how it feels to hold you . . . *(softer)* or maybe I never knew at all . . . Don’t leave me, again. I’ve been waiting so long for you. I am nothing without you. Nothing. Don’t.

MARVIN. I love you, Ginny. More than I ever thought I could love another person . . . Always you.

VIRGINIA. Always you. *(They are incredibly close, nearly kissing. VIRGINIA's eyes open.)*

MARVIN. It's me.

VIRGINIA. Always you . . . *(It seems as if she is about to kiss him, but she pulls away suddenly.)* No. NO! No, not you! Never you! *(She shoves him off her.)* This is not what I want. No! I want Lenny! I love Lenny! Not you, Marvin. Never you. Never. I couldn't. I couldn't. *(She goes close to him, grabbing at the collar of his shirt.)* Go away! Leave. Why won't you leave? Why? Why? Why? I want you to go. Please. Please Marvin, just leave. Just leave. I want you gone. I need you gone. Why won't you leave? Why won't you listen to me? What is wrong with you? *(She releases MARVIN, who simply walks back up the stairs, watching her. She clutches at her hair, her head.)* What is wrong with you? *(She rushes to turn the CD player off. She sits down in the flowery chair. Silence. She sees LENNY outside, examining the fence. LENNY sees her, too, and he waves.)*

LENNY. Virginia . . . don't you just love this fence?

(Pause. VIRGINIA does not react.)

LENNY. I built it just for you, you know. It really is stunning, beautiful . . . immaculate. It's exactly what I wanted for you.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* Lenny . . .

LENNY. Virginia, won't you come outside to greet me? I want you to come outside to greet me. I . . . I have something for you.

(VIRGINIA rises from the chair and goes outside. The lights go black on the interior. The lights go up on the exterior. LENNY remains on the outside of the fence, VIRGINIA on the inside.)

VIRGINIA. Lenny . . . it's been so long . . . *(She crosses to him.)*

LENNY. I know, I know. Work kept me late a few hours. But I'm here now. I'm back.

VIRGINIA. I waited so long for you, Lenny. I waited and waited and waited. I thought . . .

LENNY. I know you did. But I knew I'd come home to you sitting in that chair, watching out the window for me like you always do. I should have called or something . . .

VIRGINIA. No, it's fine. You're here now, and that's all that matters.

LENNY. *(Pause.)* I made you something. *(He picks up the bag.)* Here, open it. I'm hoping it will make up for me being so late getting home.

(VIRGINIA opens the bag and pulls out a green, wooden heart-shaped clock.)

VIRGINIA. Oh, Lenny. It's wonderful.

LENNY. Now you can count the hours until we're together again. I thought you'd like that.

VIRGINIA. I do. Very much. *(Pause.)* Thank you.

LENNY. I'd do anything for someone as sweet as you, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* I know.

LENNY. I love you, Virginia. I do.

VIRGINIA. Yes . . . *(She looks back at the house.)* I know you do.

LENNY. I didn't mean to be gone for as long as I was. I tried to come sooner. I just couldn't. I'm sorry. You must have been feeling worried.

VIRGINIA. It's fine . . . I'm fine. Really.

LENNY. You got along okay while I was gone? Oh, of course you did. You never have trouble finding things to do around the house while I'm gone. I'm always coming home to a spotless house or a freshly painted room or a baked cake and a dozen flowers. You're always planning something for my arrival—I don't know where you find the time . . . Yes, of course you got along okay while I was gone.

VIRGINIA. *(Pause.)* I did.

LENNY. Good, Virginia. I'm glad.

(Pause.)

VIRGINIA. Why don't you come inside? It's . . . it's getting cold out.

LENNY. You're cold? I didn't think it was that cold.

VIRGINIA. Well . . . we can stay out here if you want to. We don't have to go inside.

LENNY. Do you want to go inside?

VIRGINIA. I don't know . . . I think so.

LENNY. If you want to go inside, you can go inside.

VIRGINIA. But . . . I wanted . . . I wanted us to go inside together.

LENNY. Together?

VIRGINIA. Yes. I thought we could both go inside together.

LENNY. I don't want to go in just yet. I'm still admiring this immaculate fence.

VIRGINIA. Like Mrs. Bell.

LENNY. Like who?

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Bell. Our neighbor. She loves this fence.

LENNY. Ginny, we don't have a neighbor named Mrs. Bell. There's Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, of course, but no Mrs. Bell.

VIRGINIA. We . . . don't?

LENNY. No. We don't. Are you feeling okay?

VIRGINIA. I'm . . . I just . . . I'm tired.

LENNY. You can go inside if you want. You can wait for me in there. I shouldn't be too long. Go inside and rest.

VIRGINIA. Do you want me to go inside?

LENNY. Isn't that what you want to do? Go inside?

VIRGINIA. Well . . . yes, that's what I want to do. But I want to do it with you, together. I don't know how much I want to do it alone.

LENNY. I want you to do what you want to do. If you want to go inside, you should go inside.

VIRGINIA. I don't know what I want to do.

LENNY. I'm only going to be out here for a few more minutes. I want to get a nice, long look at this fence. If you're cold, you should wait for me inside.

VIRGINIA. I want us to be together.

LENNY. We *are* together, Virginia. Don't you see us right now? We are standing here together. *(Pause.)* I don't understand . . .

(Silence.)

LENNY. Are you okay?

VIRGINIA. Why?

LENNY. You seem . . .

VIRGINIA. I'm fine, Lenny. I'm . . . just cold.

LENNY. Why don't you go inside?

VIRGINIA. Maybe I will.

LENNY. Then you can get warm. Go ahead, sit down in that chair. Wait for me. I'll be right in.

(VIRGINIA goes back inside with the clock. The lights in the interior go up. The lights dim on LENNY, but do not go completely dark. He remains stroking and admiring the fence. VIRGINIA hangs the clock on the wall where it had been previously. She sits back down in the chair. After a moment, APRIL returns from upstairs holding a wilted white rose.)

APRIL. I forgot to tell you . . . or maybe I chose not to, but . . . *(Going to the vase of flowers)* . . . Marvin called me. Today. *(Pause.)* He wished me a happy birthday. Said he misses me, wondered how I was . . . He called me right out of the fucking blue . . . *(Pause.)* I invited him. To the party. *(Pause. She looks at the dead flower in her hand.)* You bought me a fucking dead flower, Ginitals. A fucking dead flower. You really are as pathetic as they come. *(She drops the rose to the ground.)* Pathetic. *(Pause.)* And will you shut the goddamn window already? It's so damn cold in here. *(Pause. She turns to exit, then turns back.)* He's coming. *(She exits upstairs.)*

(The stove rings. VIRGINIA rises from her chair, takes the cake out of the oven. She slams the tray with the cake on the top of the stove. The cake is burnt.)

VIRGINIA. I've . . . I've burned it. I've burned it. After all that. After all that time, and I burned the damn, easy cake. I should have just stuck with the first one. That's the one I really wanted. That's the one that would have fixed everything.

(Pause. She looks at the cake.) Now I'm left with this . . . this mess. How could I have been so careless? It's ruined. Ruined. *(Pause. She looks at the clock on the wall.)* No, no. I don't have time to be thinking like this. I . . . I don't have time to make another one. I've got to go, got to move. *(She picks up The List, scanning it.)* There are more important things to be done.

(VIRGINIA shivers for a moment. She notices the open window in the kitchen, and goes to close it. Then, she grabs the green, pink, and yellow streamers and begins cutting lengths of them to be hung.)

LENNY. Yes, this fence . . . it's one of envy for the neighbors I'm sure. There's no way they aren't jealous of it. They must stare right at it. In fact, I bet some of them are staring right this very moment *(He looks around)* . . . admiring it, praising it. I bet they'd kill to have a fence this immaculate sweeping across their lawns. Yes, that's why they stare. How it keeps things out . . . *(softer)* holds things in . . . You've got to be tender with such a fence. It's not everyday someone can bask in the presence of something as sweet as this. Yes, they must really be resentful. How could they not be? Staring all day, watching out their curtained windows with their fleshy skin and beady eyes . . . always watching, always waiting . . .

(MARVIN comes down the stairs, unnoticed by VIRGINIA, and he crosses to the window near the entrance. He stands and looks out at LENNY, who is admiring the fence.)

MARVIN. *(Pause.)* Do you think he knows?

(VIRGINIA looks up from her streamers. She does not say anything.)

MARVIN. *(Still looking at LENNY.)* About how much you need me? *(Pause.)* About how much you love me? Do you think he knows?

VIRGINIA. Please, Marvin. Step away from the window.

MARVIN. Oh, so he doesn't know?

VIRGINIA. Please. I told you to step away from the window.

MARVIN. *(Turning to face VIRGINIA.)* Are you afraid, Ginny? Are you afraid he's going to find out?

(LENNY is joined by APRIL, who is wearing a blond wig, a yellow jacket, and pale yellow pants. At first, they talk closely.)

VIRGINIA. Marvin, I told you to do something. Why won't you just do it? *(She takes a handful of streamers and tries to tape them to the top of the walls of the house, but she can't reach.)* Why are you still here?

MARVIN. Because you want me to be.

VIRGINIA. *(Almost reaching the top of the wall, but failing.)* Dammit.

MARVIN. Because you need me to be.

(LENNY and APRIL start holding hands romantically.)

VIRGINIA. *(Jumping.)* I'm so close . . .

MARVIN. Because you need me to love you, too.

(VIRGINIA stops trying to hang the streamers. She pauses, looks at MARVIN. He walks closer to her.)

(LENNY and APRIL begin to kiss.)

MARVIN. And maybe I did, once. Maybe I did love you, Ginny. Maybe I did. Maybe I dreamed about you, about us. How you'd taste on my lips, how you'd feel in my arms. What it would be like to share a life with you. To wake up to your face. To whisper "I love you" beneath the sheets and reach out and really, truly feel your sweet skin. Maybe I did dream about all that stuff. Maybe I didn't. It doesn't really matter, now, does it? It wouldn't change a *damn* thing between us if you knew how I once felt. We aren't together. We could never be together. You could never give me what I wanted, what I needed. Sylvia can. Sylvia is. That baby, that beautiful baby . . . *(Pause.)* For April. *(He walks closer to VIRGINIA.)* All this . . . for April . . . *(Silence. He extends out his hand.)* Let me help you. I want to help you.

(LENNY and APRIL stop kissing, but remain holding each other in a romantic embrace.)

VIRGINIA. I . . . Marvin . . . I can't . . . I can't let you help me . . . I . . .

MARVIN. You can let me. You can. Here, I'll start with the green. *(Reaches for the green streamer.)*

VIRGINIA. *(She pulls away.)* Marvin, please. No.

MARVIN. Then I can do the yellow . . .

VIRGINIA. I just . . . I won't hang them, is all. I just won't put them up. *(She puts them back on the counter.)*

MARVIN. Then the pink. I'll end with the sweet, sweet pink.

VIRGINIA. They don't need to go up. They don't.

MARVIN. Won't you let me do this for you?

VIRGINIA. *I can't*, Marvin. *I can't!*

MARVIN. Why not, Ginny? Why can't I help you?

VIRGINIA. Because . . . because if you do . . . I just . . . I think . . .

MARVIN. What?

VIRGINIA. *Him*. Lenny. He'll find out. He'll . . . he'll . . .

MARVIN. Leave?

(VIRGINIA nods. MARVIN walks back to the window, proceeds to watch LENNY and APRIL.)

MARVIN. *(Pause.)* Do you think he knows?

VIRGINIA. *(Crossing to MARVIN.)* Marvin, *please* stay away from the . . . *(She sees LENNY and APRIL through the window. She stands stiff, frozen.)* No! Lenny . . . ?
No, you can't . . . he can't be . . . no. No. *No!* It's not, it's not . . .

(While VIRGINIA is speaking, LENNY and APRIL exit offstage, LENNY pulling her by the hand. VIRGINIA rushes outside.)

VIRGINIA. Wait! Just wait! Where are you going? Please come home, please stay. Come back. Come back! He's *mine! Mine! Mine!* And you can't have him! Don't

leave me! Please, don't leave me . . . *(She grabs onto the fence, tight. She uses it to balance herself.)* Why did he go? Why? Why? *Why?* What is wrong with you?

(MARVIN takes the empty shopping cart off stage, then goes back up the stairs while VIRGINIA is outside.)

VIRGINIA. I . . . I love him. Didn't I love him? Didn't he love me? *(Long silence.)*
He knew. He knew all along.

(End Scene 6)

Scene 7

VIRGINIA staggers back inside.

VIRGINIA. Marvin? *Marvin?* *(Pause.)* Damn him! He . . . *he* did this! He made this happen! If I hadn't—if *he* hadn't—and now Lenny. I'm left with nothing, no one. Something has to be done. *(Pause.)* Me. I have to do something. *(Pause.)* No, no, no, I can't think that. I can't. I won't.

(VIRGINIA picks up The List and focuses intently on it.)

VIRGINIA. The . . . the cake. I still need to frost it . . . that's what I should be doing. Frosting the cake.

(VIRGINIA begins to spread the frosting over the cake. She is meticulous, but the frosting does not spread evenly and the cake looks sloppy. While VIRGINIA is doing this, MRS BELL enters through the front door. VIRGINIA does not notice her, and MRS BELL quietly goes up the stairs of the home.)

VIRGINIA. *(While frosting.)* This is what I get. This is the punishment I deserve. I . . . I made a mistake—no, not a mistake. A choice. I made a choice. I did this. I did this. *(She continues spreading the frosting, hoping to make it look more decent. Pause. She gets more aggressive with the spreading. Then, she puts the spatula she used to frost the cake down.)* I still want him. I still love him. *(In a fury, she slaps herself in the face.)* NO! I'm not allowing myself to say that. How dare I say that! That's not true. I love Lenny. Lenny, Lenny, Lenny. And I hate Marvin. Yes, hate. *(Softer.)* Don't forget that. Please, don't forget that. *(Pause.)*

(VIRGINIA picks up The List, again.)

VIRGINIA. The party favors . . . the chips and the drinks . . . Oh, and the cheese platter. Yes, I should put that out, next.

(VIRGINIA organizes the cheese platter and puts out the chips and drinks. She arranges them on the dining table. FATHER enters from the bathroom, holding a blue comb and a pink dress in his hands. He hangs the pink dress on the bathroom door. VIRGINIA does not see him.)

VIRGINIA. There. It looks okay. A little cluttered, but I have to keep moving. I don't have time. *(Thinking, looking around.)* Now . . . *(She grabs The List, scans it.)* I think I've finished decorating, except for those damn streamers. *(Looking at The List.)* I think I'll do my hair next.

FATHER. *(Turning from door.)* Do you remember, Gin, how I used to comb your hair? How sweet you'd smell after a nice, long bath? Do you remember that, Gin? Or did you choose to forget?

(FATHER drops the comb. He exits to the bathroom. VIRGINIA picks up the comb and flips it through her hair. Her combing becomes more aggressive after a while.)

VIRGINIA. *(Suddenly, she throws the comb at the bathroom, furious.)* Dammit! I can't do this! I can't.

(VIRGINIA returns to the kitchen, spotting the cigarettes. She picks up the pack, pulls out a cigarette, and, before she can convince herself not to, lights it in her mouth. Her inhale is long, passionate, deep. She blows out for what seems like an eternity. She is calm.)

APRIL'S VOICE. Are you *fucking* smoking? Is that what that god-awful *smell* is?

(VIRGINIA snaps out of it. Quickly, she opens up the window and tries to blow some of the smoke outside.)

APRIL'S VOICE. God, I can smell that shit from a mile away!

(APRIL enters from the staircase. VIRGINIA chucks the cigarette out the window, and turns to face APRIL as if nothing is happening.)

APRIL. You fucking *were*, weren't you? You were fucking *smoking* again. After all these years . . . After all that *time* . . . You're such a baby. A fucking *baby*. *(She looks around, then at the clock.)* You better hurry up, Ginitals. You don't have much time. *(The sound of a car door slamming shut is heard.)* In fact, you don't have much time at all. *(Pause.)* And close that *damn* window. God, how many times do I have to tell you? *(APRIL exits back up the stairs.)*

VIRGINIA. *(Slamming the window.)* No, no! They can't be here. They can't! *(VIRGINIA rushes to the window and peers out, frantic.)* I'm not ready yet, I'm not ready for them. I'm not prepared. They can't be here, they . . . *(She pauses.)* Oh . . . it's not them. It's . . . it's Mr. Johnson. *(Turning away from the window.)* It's only Mr. Johnson.

(As VIRGINIA crosses to the window, MRS BELL returns from upstairs. She is carrying a white, wooden trunk. Pink roses are painted on the trunk. She puts the trunk down center stage, and kneels beside it.)

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Bell . . .

MRS BELL. *(Not looking up from the trunk.)* Would you like to see it, dear?

VIRGINIA. *(She steps closer to MRS BELL, slowly.)* Yes. *(Pause.)* How did you know where it was?

MRS BELL. Oh, I just . . . I knew.

VIRGINIA. You know . . . Lenny used to have one.

MRS BELL. He did? Well, maybe they're the same kind. Come here, I'll show you. (*VIRGINIA steps closer.*) Just don't tell Leo I've shown you. He'll have a fit. He thinks this is the only thing left preserving his manhood.

VIRGINIA. Yes, Lenny was . . . Lenny was the same way. He never even let me touch it. (*Pause.*) I'd . . . I'd love to hold one . . . to remember him by.

MRS BELL. (*Looking up from the trunk.*) To . . . remember him by? What do you mean, dear?

VIRGINIA. Well . . . he's . . . umm . . . Lenny's *dead*.

MRS BELL. No! Lenny . . . ? *Dead?* (*Long silence.*) I'm so sorry, Ginny. When did this happen to you?

VIRGINIA. A year ago . . . in a . . . a car crash.

MRS BELL. I don't know what to say, Ginny. Here I was, asking you about your husband . . . I should have been more considerate, I—

VIRGINIA. It's fine. You didn't remember.

MRS BELL. Well, actually, I didn't *know* . . .

VIRGINIA. I know you didn't, Mrs. Bell. I know.

(Silence.)

MRS BELL. I . . . I know it's kind of a strange place . . . for a gun . . . but at least we know someone won't find it. Who would think to look in here for a weapon? That's what makes it such a good hiding place. Nobody'd think twice about checking an old, worn trunk. Come, get down here with me.

VIRGINIA. *(Getting on her knees.)* Do you have the key?

MRS BELL. Oh, that's right! Even if they did suspect the trunk, they'd still have to find the key. That's another task by itself.

VIRGINIA. Well, where is it?

MRS BELL. I've got it here. *(She pulls out a key from her pocket and shows it to VIRGINIA.)* We keep this little bugger upstairs in the dresser . . . This gun isn't too helpful in a dire situation, but . . . we just have it . . . you know . . . in case.

VIRGINIA. In case? What . . . what do you mean?

MRS BELL. What do you mean, *what do I mean?* In case! That's all.

VIRGINIA. I just don't know what—

MRS BELL. I'd really rather not talk about it, if you don't mind. Let's just not talk about it. *(Silence. MRS BELL puts the key in the hole.)* Now, I'll just stick it in the keyhole, and . . .

VIRGINIA. Wait. Just wait.

MRS BELL. *(Turning to face VIRGINIA.)* Why? For what, Ginny?

VIRGINIA. I know, just . . .

MRS BELL. Come on, Ginny. I have to hurry. My kitties need me. I haven't got all day.

VIRGINIA. Hold on, please. I have to tell you—

MRS BELL. *What? What is wrong with you? (Silence. MRS BELL turns the key and opens the trunk. They both stare at the contents of the trunk.)* There it is.

VIRGINIA. May I . . . hold it?

(MRS BELL reaches into the trunk and pulls out a black gun. She hands it delicately to VIRGINIA, as if it's a newborn baby.)

MRS BELL. Here you go, dear. But be careful, I think Leo might have left a bullet inside. Wouldn't want you to . . . you know . . .

(VIRGINIA stares at the gun in her hands. She holds it close to her chest, rocking slightly back and forth in her position on the ground.)

MRS BELL. Oh, dear, I know . . . *Lenny* . . .

VIRGINIA. Right . . . *Lenny* . . .

(Long pause.)

MRS BELL. I should . . . I should go back home to my kitties now. They need their supper. And they need to be bathed.

(MRS BELL goes to reach for the gun, but VIRGINIA pulls away.)

VIRGINIA. Can I have a few more moments . . . *alone*? It's just . . . *Lenny* . . .

MRS BELL. Sure. I'll . . . I'll retrieve this after the party. Don't let me forget, Ginny. You know how I am. *(She exits out the front door.)*

(VIRGINIA stares at the gun. She runs her fingers along it, feeling every curve, every inch. Absorbing the weight of its body. She cradles it in her arms like a baby.)

(LENNY enters from the staircase with a pen. He grabs The List off the counter, then sits down at the dining table and begins to write. VIRGINIA places the gun on the table next to him. Then, she crosses to the dress and changes into it throughout the speech. When she is done changing, she goes and sits in the flowery chair.)

LENNY. *(Writing.)* Dearest. Please read this and remember my love for you. I am doing this not because I want to, but because I have to. I have found someone new to be with. Someone who fulfills the things you could only dream of fulfilling for me. I am starting a new life, and with it, a new family. She and I . . . we're expecting a baby. I know how much you wanted to give me a child, but you couldn't. You couldn't. And now, you no longer need to feel burdened by my selfish desires. I hope you are thankful for that. Having a baby with you . . . well, it wouldn't have felt . . . *right*. I do not mean for it to sound harsh, but it's true in its essence. It would have been forced upon us, unlike a blessing. Why, having a baby with—I will not say her name . . . but having a baby with her just felt so natural, so *damn* easy. Organic. The ingredients just came together. I would have loved to have a family with you, but there were no options for us. No *real* options for us. I am so sorry to say that. *(Pause.)* Do you remember the night we stole away to that open field with all the flowers under the stars? And you picked me those white roses—yes, my favorite—and we just laid there, gazing up at the stars and the moon? Without any boundaries or fences . . . we were free. Out in the

open. Well, that's how I feel now—free. And you should, too. We are free from each other. Released. Forgive me if this sounds cold. I *loved* you, Virginia. More than I ever thought I could love another person. And I still do. I will never stop loving you, just like I promised. I just had to make a choice. I hope you see as I see, that you are free from me, my desires, my burdens. Just freedom. That's all I've ever wanted for you. Nothing more. Nothing less. Every minute. Always waiting, always you, Virginia. Always you. *L.*

(VIRGINIA rises from her chair and crosses to the table. She picks up the gun and examines it.)

LENNY. P.S. I've left you the gun. You know where it is. Just in case . . . one bullet is loaded. Please read this and remember my love for you.

(LENNY puts the pen down. APRIL in the same blond wig and outfit as before is standing outside the fence. LENNY rises from his chair and exits out the front door. He joins hands with APRIL, and they exit.)

VIRGINIA. He knew. He knew all along . . . And so did I. I knew all along, too. *(She puts the gun back in the trunk.)* I just chose to forget, forget, forget.

(End of Scene 7)

Scene 8

(MRS BELL enters through the front door.)

MRS BELL. *(In the doorway.)* You almost fooled me. You were very, very close to having me convinced.

(VIRGINIA freezes, unable to say anything.)

MRS BELL. Very, *very* close. I *wanted* to believe you. Really, I did. That lie about Lenny's death *almost* got me . . . *almost*. The first time you told me was the most believable, though, don't you think? *(Pause.)* What you delivered today was . . . well, it was *pathetic*, honestly. You'd think after having a *year* to come up with something you wouldn't keep resorting to that lame story about a car crash. I'm craving something *better*. I want a better story next time. I want you to work for my tears.

VIRGINIA. What . . . what are you doing, Mrs. Bell?

MRS BELL. Don't give me that. You know *damn* well what I'm doing.

VIRGINIA. Please, don't do this today. Don't do this to me right now.

MRS BELL. Why not? Now couldn't be a more perfect time. I thought this was what you wanted.

VIRGINIA. I can't . . . I don't . . . Please, Mrs. Bell.

MRS BELL. This was your plan, after all. Here, let me help you get started. *(She crosses to the CD player and turns it on. Mozart's Requiem in D Minor begins)*

playing.) Perfect. It's just what you like. Is it loud enough? I can turn it up if you like.

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Bell, please don't . . . I just . . .

MRS BELL. What? This doesn't work for you? Is this not working for you?
(*Beginning to spin, twirl, dance.*) I like it. I thought you liked this . . .

VIRGINIA. I don't . . . I just don't understand . . .

MRS BELL. You're kidding, right? What's not to understand about this? (*Pause. She stops dancing.*) Don't tell me you thought I was *actually* oblivious . . . that I *actually forgot, forgot, forgot.* (*Pause.*) No. I *can't* forget, Ginny. I can't. I've got it all stored away, up in here. (*She taps on her head.*)

VIRGINIA. Don't say that. Please, don't say that. (*She crosses to the CD player and shuts the music off. She crosses to the flowery chair and sits in it.*) I can't . . . I can't. You're not making sense, Mrs. Bell. You're . . . you're making stuff up just to mess with me before the party, that's what you're doing. I don't know why you're doing it, but you are.

MRS BELL. Oh, no, no, no, dear. You don't get to paint me like that anymore. Don't you fucking *dare* act like you don't know what I'm talking about. You know exactly what I'm talking about. *You* fucking started this whole *damn* charade in the first place. *You. You. You!*

VIRGINIA. I didn't. I didn't.

MRS BELL. And now it's got to end, Ginny. You can't keep going like this forever. This party was the end from the beginning, you knew that. You *planned* that.

VIRGINIA. No, you couldn't have known that . . .

MRS BELL. Why else do you think I gave you that gun? Why else do you think I let you keep it until after the party tonight? Because I fucking *knew*, Ginny. *(Pause.)* I knew all along, too. *(Pause.)* That gun will stop everything, Ginny. It will stop the time from turning. It will stop you from knowing. It will stop *them* from knowing. You won't have to wait any longer.

VIRGINIA. Mrs. Bell, I can't . . . but what about Lenny . . . if I could have just given him what he wanted, things would have been better. He would have stayed. I never would have . . . if I had just given him what he wanted.

MRS BELL. You never would have been able to give him what he wanted. What he needed. You couldn't. You can't. That baby . . . that beautiful baby . . . *(Pause.)* Do you really believe Lenny loved you, Ginny? Do you really think that? Do you think that fence was his way of showing you affection?

VIRGINIA. He . . . he built that fence to protect me.

MRS BELL. He built that fence to lock you up! To keep you trapped here, Ginny. So he could leave whenever he wanted, knowing that you'd always be waiting for him to return. You were his fucking *cat*, Ginny. Nothing more than a measly pet to him.

VIRGINIA. That's not true!

MRS BELL. He wanted you here, Ginny. That's all he ever wanted for you. To keep you trapped here like a caged animal.

VIRGINIA. Stop it! He didn't, he couldn't . . .

MRS BELL. Are they staring at the fence, Ginny? Or are they staring at *you*?

VIRGINIA. He loved me!

MRS BELL. Did he?

(Silence.)

MRS BELL. He would have left no matter what you gave him, Ginny. *(Pause.)* But he wasn't the one you really wanted, was he? He wasn't the one who could truly, deeply satisfy you, was he?

VIRGINIA. Please, stop . . . it's too much.

MRS BELL. You tried to conceal how you felt. You tried to convince yourself it wasn't real. That you were imagining things. That you didn't *need* Marvin . . .

VIRGINIA. No . . .

MRS BELL. But you did. You do. Lenny would have found out eventually, oh yes he would have, but you couldn't let that happen. Of course you tried to distract yourself as long as you could. *If I clean, if I paint, if I plan a party . . .* What do you think all this is for? That's what all this is, isn't it? A distraction. To keep *them* *(pointing out the window)* from knowing the truth. To keep *you* from knowing the truth. The party was your last hooray, your last and final distraction. Then . . . well, you know.

VIRGINIA. I can't do this to him. I can't.

MRS BELL. Do *what*? Do you think he's going to be affected by this? Do you think he fucking *cared* about you, Ginny? He's gone. There was nothing you could have

done to keep him from moving on. *(Pause.)* This party . . . it's not about Marvin, or Lenny, or April. It never was. It's all about you, Ginny. You!

(LENNY and MARVIN enter from the bathroom, carrying a clawfoot tub. MARVIN is holding a brown balloon, LENNY a white balloon. They place the tub near VIRGINIA and MRS BELL, then cross to the table and tie their balloons to the backs of their chairs, leaving a chair between them. Following behind is FATHER, holding a blue balloon. He crosses to the table and ties his balloon to the chair at the head of the table, closest to the tub. APRIL enters from the stairs carrying a green balloon. She crosses to the table and ties the green balloon to the chair in between LENNY's and MARVIN's balloons. MOTHER enters from the staircase carrying a purple balloon. She crosses to the table and ties the balloon to the chair opposite FATHER's. LENNY, MARVIN, FATHER, APRIL, and MOTHER sit synchronously at their respective chairs.)

MRS BELL. April will like the party, I'm sure, because it will give her something to criticize, something to complain about. Father will try to pretend nothing's wrong, that he's not sneaking sips of Gin—his favorite—from the bathroom. Mother will care more about April's concerns with the party than anything else. Always did, always had, always would. They'd find a way to blame Father, too, to twist the world against him. That's what they did best. Marvin and Lenny will pretend to care about you, about this party. *(Pause.)* And me? What will I, poor, old, deranged Mrs. Bell, think of the party? Well, it doesn't matter what I think . . . There's no room for us at that table . . . You never planned for us to come at all . . .

(Silence. There is an obvious shift in energy in MRS BELL. She is calmer, more serene. She's noticing her words taking effect in VIRGINIA.)

MRS BELL. You can imagine he would return to you. He would swerve into the driveway in his Pontiac, walk through the front door, call out your name, embrace you in a sweet, sweet hug, kiss you tenderly on the mouth, ask how you've been,

if you've missed him. But you and I know better, don't we? He would choose not to return. He would choose to forget you ever existed. (*MRS BELL goes to The List on the table. She picks it up, scans it over.*) Not a List . . . never a List . . . a letter . . . his letter to you. He would be gone, anyway. They all would. They're all the same. Marvin, Lenny, Father, Mother, April . . . they're all the same . . . There's nothing we can do . . .

(*VIRGINIA sinks into a catatonic state, unable to move.*)

MRS BELL. Why don't we take a bath before the party? (*MRS BELL undresses VIRGINIA and leads her to the tub.*) Yes, let's get in the tub. One foot at a time. Easy. (*MRS BELL lowers VIRGINIA into the tub, as if she is a small child.*) There we go.

VIRGINIA. (*Mumbling.*) They're gone. They're gone. They're gone.

(*MRS BELL crosses to the CD player and hits "play". Mozart's Requiem in D Minor begins.*)

MARVIN. It's me.

(*MRS BELL gets the gun from the trunk.*)

LENNY. Always you.

(*MRS BELL walks the gun to VIRGINIA.*)

FATHER. You're my favorite, Gin.

(*MRS BELL holds the gun out to VIRGINIA.*)

APRIL. He was fucking *mine*.

(Silence. MRS BELL kneels beside VIRGINIA in the tub. Together, they place the gun to VIRGINIA's forehead. Lights off on everyone but MRS BELL and VIRGINIA.)

MRS BELL. They're gone.

(Lights and sound out.)

End

II. Afterword: The Directing Process

For this show to be successful, I needed to cast Norah St. Peter (formerly Bird) as Virginia. I observed her abilities in the Spring 2015 production of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and I was overwhelmed with her capacity to create and convey riveting and complex inner worlds through her characterization of Constance. The character of Virginia is a similar one to Constance insofar as their affectedness, and I knew she would do an excellent job carrying my production. I also worked closely with her on her self-written thesis, *Zugzwang*, a one-act play about an abusive relationship, and I was nothing but confident in our ability to work cohesively and efficiently on my production. She not only acted as the lead role, but she acted as the unofficial directing consultant as I found myself gravitating towards her for advice on aesthetics and blocking throughout the process. Having secured Norah, I approached Taylor Cronin and Meredith Olivari to play Mrs. Bell and April respectively, both of whom eagerly accepted. Casting the male roles was a trickier task. I initially asked Nathan Reeves, Reed Davis, and Fenton Cummings to play Marvin, Father, and Lenny respectively, though all three declined due to scheduling conflicts. It was through the Fall 2016 production of *Big Love* that I was introduced to Noah Frie, who I cast as Father, and Curran Grant, who I cast as Lenny. Through those connections, I found Jacob Buttarazzi, who I cast as Marvin without ever having seen him act. Physically, all three fit what I wanted for the male roles, and I was pleased to finally have a full cast! I decided against holding auditions as I wanted to cast people I knew and could trust throughout the process.

During the casting process, I approached Cleo Barker about being the Stage Manager, as I knew she had expressed interest in Stage Managing *Almost, Maine*, and I knew she had experience Stage Managing a past production of *Godspell*. I was extremely impressed by her ability to manage such a daunting and arduous production, and I knew she would do an excellent job with my production. She emphatically agreed to join the show, and from there I enlisted Katherine Dube and Lillianne Condez as co-Assistant Stage Managers. We zealously had an unofficial read-through on December second before having any other technical positions filled, and I was excited by how the production sounded regardless of not knowing what the set, props, and lights would be.

I patiently waited for March, crafting tentative rehearsal and production calendars for the production and securing the Al Cyrus Pavilion through Birdie Sawyer. During that time, I also approached Kali Pelletier to be the set designer as I knew she had a keen interest in the field, and Noah Frie expressed interest in being the lighting designer as he was scheduled to take a class on the subject during the Spring 2017 semester. I enlisted Michelle Bassis as the Hair/Makeup/Costume Designer as I was absolutely stunned by her designs for the touring production of *James and the Giant Peach*, and Taylor Cronin offered to be the Publicity Manager as she is studying advertising and communication. Properties and sound fell to me as I could not find someone interested in fulfilling those positions on the production team, though I would have liked to have found someone to handle the properties for me. I also applied for the Charlie Slavin Fund Scholarship through the Honors College, for which I was accepted, and the CUGR grant through the University, for which I was denied. Knowing that I was only going to have around \$200

for the entire production was important, as it drastically affected the set designer's, property master's, and costume designer's ability to be superfluous. Everything had to be designed and crafted with our stock in mind, as we would be pulling and building most of the items and pieces from that. It was imperative that I remained in direct and constant contact with MJ Sedlock, the University's Technical Director/Production Manager, as she was the one who could best assist us on a low budget. Thankfully, she offered me free flats for the walls, free paint, and free labor from the scene shop, so I was able to allocate some of the funds to other areas. With that in mind, Kali drafted a set with concepts for the walls and floor, which Cleo and I were able to use during the rehearsal process to denote blocking. Before we officially began rehearsals, Lillianne had to drop the show due to a medical emergency, but Cleo was positive in Katie's abilities to handle the task of Assistant Stage Managing on her own despite being cast in the overlapping production of *Almost, Maine*.

Rehearsals officially began on March 13th, the second Monday of Spring Break, despite not having Cleo, Katie, Jake, Curran, or Meredith until the following week. I used this week to flesh out Virginia and Mrs. Bell with Norah and Taylor, as the two needed to be entirely on the same page with their characters. It was during this week that we decided Mrs. Bell was a projection, and how to go about blocking and line delivering based on that decision. We also determined Father and Virginia's relationship with Norah and Noah, deciding exactly what happened between them, at what age, for how long, and why it stopped. These mental notes helped them make informed blocking decisions, and allowed them to draw connections between themselves and their characters. It was also

during this week that I decided to have the Mother become a character in the play, casting Katie Dube in the role.

Once we had the full cast back from Spring Break, we continued building on the timeline constructed between Father and Virginia, adding in April, Mother, Lenny, and Marvin. I needed to ensure that we were secure in what type of world we were trying to paint before deciding to pick up a paint brush. I made sure that each of their character choices was grounded in the text, and that they were utilizing all of the context clues laid out for them. I didn't want them just making decisions about their characters, I wanted them making decisions based on provided facts, and I wanted them to be able to defend their character choices strongly. Before putting any of the scenes on their feet, I implemented a 'table-talk' read-through and discussion with the actors, both to familiarize them with the scenes and to get their minds engaged in the story and the text. It was during these 'table-talks' that I allowed the actors to approach me with questions, thoughts, or ideas about why their character says what he or she says. This made the blocking come naturally, and allowed the actors to focus more on movement than on delivery and lines. I avoided bringing the 'writer' version of myself into the directorial space as I didn't want any of the actors to rely on me for solid answers. I instead wanted them to pull from the script themselves and truly analyze what's being said and why. Being able to separate my 'writer' self from my 'director' self was one of the main reasons the 'table-talks' were effective and productive, because it forced the actors to have conversations about the various threads present in the script. I enjoyed being

exposed to their multiple and differing perspectives, as they produced many scenarios and possibilities to delineate.

We suffered a setback on March 20th when I received an email from Curran stating that he was dropping the show. I turned immediately to Michele Begley, the Stage Manager of *Almost, Maine*, and asked her for a list of people who auditioned for the production and were not cast, and Willem Hilliard's name surfaced. I contacted and auditioned him that Wednesday, and was surprised by how fluid and organic he sounded as Lenny. Without hesitation, I offered him the role, which he accepted, and I informed him of the created timeline.

With our cast fully stocked, we continued diving deep into the content and nature of the characters. I held many individual and small-group rehearsals where we would read through the script and analyze each and every sentence—asking why the character says it, how the character says it, and to what purpose it serves to the overall goal of the character. I also had everyone close their eyes while I asked them prompting questions about their characters, some of which included: How old am I? Do I have any mannerisms? What was my childhood like? What is my occupation? Do I like my family? What hobbies or interests do I have? What makes me angry? What do I worry about? Why can't I get what I want? How do I express my attitude? By forcing them to answer each of these questions, I ensured that a background was being crafted for each character, and that they were starting to think about their true intentions and motivations, and the reasonings behind these intentions and motivations. Jake in particular discovered many similarities between himself and Marvin, which allowed him to further connect and

empathize with him. With these exercises, it was my full intent for each actor to know their characters as much as they know themselves, and I think I was successful in achieving that goal.

After character developments were established and discussed, I moved onto physicality and vocalization. I worked heavily with Taylor on eliminating her ‘character voice’, as I needed Mrs. Bell to not be so obviously fake. This involved playing around with the pitch and intonation of her speech and utilizing her naturally low and resonant voice to create a dynamic character, rather than allowing her voice to become screechy and imitative. I forced her to say all of Mrs. Bell’s lines in her natural speaking voice, picking when and where it was appropriate to fluctuate into a higher register. I wanted Mrs. Bell to sound more like Taylor speaking and less like Taylor trying to speak like an old woman. Through the implementation of her own speaking voice, she was able to ground Mrs. Bell in something real, which helped her achieve a more interesting, personable, and believable characterization.

I tackled Meredith next, whose naturally quiet and timid voice needed to be amplified to maximum volume. To solve this, I had her scream all of April’s lines, ignoring intonation and inflection. I wanted her to scream as loudly as she could without thinking of anything else. This forced her to break out of her comfort zone and experiment with the true levels of her voice, and it highlighted which lines sounded natural when screamed. We were then able to pick and choose which lines needed to be dialed back, and which lines needed to remain being screamed, and this constructed a beautifully vibrant mix of fiery anger and sadness within April. This also gave Meredith

the sense of dominance and control that she needed to accurately and effectively portray April. With each passing rehearsal, I watched as Meredith continued to vocally blossom, which translated effortlessly into her physicality.

I next decided to have the entire cast partake in the screaming exercise, as I was thoroughly impressed with the quality of performance I was receiving from Meredith. I had the cast run their scenes at full volume, and then I asked them how it made them feel. Their responses were similar, all stating that they felt energized and revved up! They also noted that the screaming made the scenes take on a comedic quality. I explained how making a bold choice, such as yelling, immediately creates and sets a tone, and that, while I don't want them to yell every line, I want them to make bold choices in their delivery. They have to take the energy that screaming gives them and channel it appropriately into their character's delivery. Once they realized that, their characters started to come to life, and they were less afraid to make strong choices. There was more to watch, analyze, and critique, which made the entire process more rewarding as I was able to comment on and discover more and more things. I continually utilized the screaming method whenever I felt they were in low energy or spirit, and it always worked to kick them into high gear.

Father's drunken state was another vocal and physical challenge. I worked extensively with Noah on trying to make his speech more slurred and less choppy, but we could never find a happy medium upon which to settle. I tried having him deliver the lines with his tongue wedged up against his lower lip, hoping to force his words to sound slurry and dopey, but he expressed diction issues that would cause his lines to be

completely incoherent to the audience. We also played around with his physicality, as I didn't want Father to be stumbling around to the point of distraction, but I wanted it be clear that he was not sober. However, I found that Noah's physicality was *always* too distracting, even when I told him to tone it down. It created too many unanswered and unnecessary questions. Just before tech week, we decided to have him play the role as slightly tipsy, which I think worked the best overall. Noah's vocals were no longer inhibited by being drunk, and neither was his physicality, both of which drastically improved upon the change.

There were many artistic liberties taken with the direction of this play, things that I had never initially planned on including while writing it. The fence, for instance, was one of the biggest aesthetic changes. I had discussed previously with Tom about not having an actual fence as part of the design (both for monetary purposes and stylistic reasons), but I realized that *something* needed to represent the fence once rehearsals began. That's when I turned to Norah, who offered a suggestion that was inspired by her time as a member of Speech and Debate. She told me how affective and creepy it would be to have each of the characters sitting on the floor in the shape of the fence, and though at first we laughed, we soon began seriously debating the matter. I decided that I would implement the change during that night's rehearsal, and if looked silly then we would scrap it. But it didn't. I rearranged a few blocking moments to include this change, and began fiddling with actor placement during particular moments (having April stand in front of Marvin while referencing him, for instance). It added a beautiful dimension to the show, and immediately painted the surrealistic mood we wanted to convey.

The ending was another large change we initiated due to character discoveries. The original ending of the script called for Mrs. Bell to hold the gun up to her own head to solidify her being real and Virginia being the projection. However, we realized how much more powerful it was to have Virginia be the real person, so we shifted the ending to fit the mold. Instead, Mrs. Bell held the gun up to Virginia's head with Virginia's assistance, as if they were both committing the act together. I also added Mozart's *Lacrimosa* into the final scene to heighten the intensity and to tie the piece into the play as a whole. These changes made it into the final edition of the script.

Throughout the month of April, the actors began running their scenes off book, and I was able to focus my direction on the overall flow and pacing of the show. This required intensive, one-on-one transition work with Norah, whose character essentially controlled the speed of the show. During these one-on-one rehearsals, I had Norah run all of her silent scenes to work out an efficient strategy for each, ensuring that each transition was run in the exact same manner for each run of the show. Repetition and monotony was the key to having effective transitions between scenes, and I think we did a great job of replicating the moments as similarly as possible each night.

It was during the month of April that we invited Julie Lisnet and Tom Mikotowicz to sit in on a rehearsal to offer critiques and general feedback to me and the actors. Julie came on Friday, April 14th during our final rehearsal before tech week. She provided useful information about clarity and conciseness, and how to convey what's real and what's imagined. I found her notes insightful, particularly the ones regarding Father. She discussed his drunkenness with me and Noah, and how to fine-tune it so that it's

portrayed clearly and effectively. Taking her notes into consideration, we jumped into tech week with high spirits! Tom came on Wednesday, April 19th, a mere two days before opening night. His feedback focused on the new technical elements (lights, specifically) and how they need to be properly utilized to create as little confusion as possible. Our initial lighting concept included a sharp, pink light that highlighted specific scenes, but Tom pointed out that it caused too much confusion in regards to what's real and what's imagined. It didn't make much sense to have some scenes flooded in pink while others remained stark if *all* of it's essentially imagined. Rather, he suggested using more focused and centered lighting to highlight specific scenes and characters, and to rely on the pink light to drown out the ending scene only. His critiques were extremely beneficial, and aided in the overall quality of the production.

Tech week itself was exciting, as we were finally able to incorporate the perishable props and all of the necessary technical elements. The incorporation of the perishable props did not phase Norah in the slightest, and she continued to glide through her scenes and blocking effortlessly. I was thoroughly impressed with Cleo's ability to remain both flexible and calm as I made constant changes to lighting cues up until opening night. Her confidence reassured me that my changes would be executed properly and flawlessly each night, regardless of how many practice runs she received. Our longest rehearsal during the week ran until 10:25PM, which is astounding. A normal tech rehearsal usually runs until at least 11:00PM, if not later, so the fact that we were dismissing actors before then was incredibly up-lifting. I was extremely stressed during the week, as terrible bouts

of panic and second-guessing ensued, but I was fully confident in my actors and technical managers' ability to produce a tremendously powerful show.

We were all pleased with how the shows went. We had a total of 125 audience members over the three runs, our largest night being the Saturday evening performance. Surprisingly, the only technical elements that went awry were a few of the lighting cues, though all cues were fixed and executed appropriately by Sunday's performance (thankfully, as Sunday's performance was recorded!). I found each of the talk-backs beneficial for the audience, as many of them had stylistic and symbolic questions. The Friday evening talk-back was centered mostly on the writing process, and how difficult it was to both write *and* direct a play of such potency. The Saturday evening talk-back featured more comments on symbolism and plot, and many people were curious and intrigued by the inclusion and execution of the fence. They seemed to understand most of what was being conveyed with the fence, and it was fun to delve into the reasonings behind its inclusion. I was also asked why I chose to write something about mental illness, and how I was able to write something so raw and dark, which allowed me to elaborate on the importance and severity of the cause. The Sunday matinee talk-back included questions about what I found to be the most difficult aspect of directing, and what I learned from the experience. I was also asked a question about the inclusion of the tub, which allowed me to elaborate on Father and Virginia's relationship, and the symbolic elements associated with bathing and cleansing one's self. Overall, people seemed disturbed, perplexed, and amazed that students could produce something so meaningful, and I am proud and impressed that I was able to achieve my goal.

Appendix A: The Cast and Crew List

The Party

Official Cast List

Norah St. Peter	Virginia
Taylor Cronin	Mrs. Bell
Meredith Olivari	April
Jake Buttarazzi	Marvin
Willem Hilliard	Lenny
Noah Frie	Father
Katie Dube	Mother

Official Crew List

Derrek Schrader	Director
Cleo Barker	Stage Manager
Katie Dube	Assistant Stage Manager
Kali Pelletier	Scenic Designer
Kali Pelletier/Derrek Schrader	Properties Master
Noah Frie	Lighting Designer
Derrek Schrader	Sound Designer
Michelle Bassis	Costumes/Hair/Makeup Designer
Erin Butts	Run Crew

Appendix B: The Rehearsal Schedule

The Party

Agenda-View Rehearsal Schedule

Mar 13th	6pm-8pm	Blocking	Scenes 1, 4
Mar 14th	6pm-8pm	Blocking	Scenes 5, 7, 8
Mar 17th	6pm-8:30pm	Blocking	Scenes 3, 5
Mar 20th	5:30pm-8:30pm	Blocking	Scenes 1, 2, 4
Mar 21st	6:30pm-7:30pm	Character Work	Meredith, Jake, Noah, Katie
Mar 27th	6pm-8:35pm	Blocking	Scenes 5, 6, 7
Mar 28th	6pm-7:45pm	Character Work	Meredith, Taylor
Mar 29th	6pm-8:50pm	Cleaning	Scenes 2, 3, 6, 7, 8
Mar 30th	6:05pm-8pm	Table Work	Scenes 1-5
April 1st	12:20pm-3:30pm	Cleaning	Transitions, Dances, Scene 1
April 2nd		OFF BOOK DATE	
April 2nd	6:05pm-8:45pm	Run-Thru	All
April 3rd	6pm-9pm	Speed-Thru, Cleaning	Scenes 1, 3, 5, 7, 8
April 5th	6pm-9pm	Character/Line Work	All (no Jake, Katie)
April 7th	6pm-7:40pm	Transitions	Norah
April 10th	6pm-8:40pm	Run-Thru	All
April 11th	6:05pm-8pm	Cleaning	Scenes 1, 2, 6, 8
April 12th	6pm-8:15pm	Run-Thru	All
April 13th	6:10pm-9:00pm	Stop and Go	Scenes 1-7
April 14th	6pm-9pm	Run-Thru	All (Julie)
April 15th	10:15am-2pm	Technical Rehearsal #1	All
April 15th	3pm-3:35pm	Technical Rehearsal #1	All
April 17th	5:45pm-8:45pm	Run-Thru	All
April 18th	6pm-10:25pm	Table Work, Run-Thru	All
April 19th	5:30pm-9:35pm	Run-Thru	All (Tom)
April 20th	6pm-10pm	Run-Thru and Curtain Call	All
April 21st	6pm-9:20pm	OPENING (Performance 1)	All
April 22nd	6pm-9:30pm	Performance 2	All
April 23rd	3pm-6:20pm	Performance 3	All
April 23rd	6:30pm-8:30pm	STRIKE	All

Appendix C: The Character/Scene Breakdown

I found it essential to map out when the characters enter and exit, and what their motivation is upon entering and exiting. Breaking down the show into simple, meaningful sentences allowed me to deliver straight-forward and effective direction to the actors, and to provide them with context. I started with the external conflicts, what *actually* happens in accordance to the script, and then I described the internal conflicts, what *emotionally* happens in accordance to the character. This allowed me to see what I needed to convey both internally and externally within each scene, and immediately created conflict and controversy between each of the characters. Knowing that the characters are *desperate*, *agitated*, or *overwhelmed*, and knowing the reasons why, is one of the greatest assets as a director, and subsequently, as an actor. This was single-handedly the most utilized piece of paperwork I created for the show, as it equipped me with context, background, and motivation for each character and for each scene. The scene breakdown is as follows:

The Party

Character/Scene Breakdown

	Scene 1 (pg. 3-7)	Scene 2 (pg. 8-14)	Scene 3 (pg. 15-19)	Scene 4 (pg. 20-27)	Scene 5 (pg. 28-34)	Scene 6 (pg. 35-45)	Scene 7 (pg. 46-53)	Scene 8 (pg. 54-59)
VIRGINIA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
MRS. BELL	X			X			X	X
APRIL			X (as Sylvia) X (as April)		X (as April)	X (as April) X (as Sylvia)	X (as April)	X (as April)
MARVIN		X	X			X		X
LENNY						X	X	X
FATHER					X		X	X
MOTHER								X

Scene 1:**Pages 3-7***External Conflict:*

Virginia needs to get to the store to buy the ingredients for the cake, but the lonely Mrs. Bell is desperately seeking her company.

Internal Conflict:

Virginia does not want to appear rude by leaving Mrs. Bell.
Mrs. Bell does not want to offend her by being overly assertive.

Scene 2:**Pages 8-14***External Conflict:*

Marvin sees that Virginia needs help baking the cake. He accidentally breaks her eggs, and then informs her that his girlfriend Sylvia is expecting a baby, much to her dismay.

Internal Conflict:

Virginia does not want to appear weak by getting his help. She wants to appear independent of him, and that she is fine.
Marvin is guilty for ever letting their relationship get as romantic as it did.

Scene 3:**Pages 15-19***External Conflict:*

Virginia tries to bake the cake while Sylvia and Marvin have sex in front of her. April comes in out of her need to make sure the party is going smoothly, and belittles Virginia.

Internal Conflict:

Virginia cannot make the cake while her heart is breaking.
April cannot let Virginia gather any confidence out of fear that she will be liked more than her. She doesn't want Virginia to have any sort of redemption for what has previously happened.

Scene 4:**Pages 20-27***External Conflict:*

Mrs. Bell comes over to distract Virginia from her baking. Virginia lashes out at Mrs. Bell over something she thinks she said, and Mrs. Bell continually brings up certain things (Lenny) that Virginia does not want to discuss. The cake comes out perfect, but Virginia throws it out anyway with hopes of making an even better one.

Internal Conflict:

Mrs. Bell is lonely and wants to show that she is a friend.
Virginia is more agitated with Mrs. Bell's actions.

Scene 5:**Pages 28-34***External:*

Virginia's father calls to manipulate Virginia into staying on his side despite his alcoholism destroying the family. He wants to regain control over her like he used to have when she was a child.

Internal:

Virginia cannot bake a cake because she is overwhelmed by her past. She loves him because he is her father, but she cannot allow herself to go back to him. Father is torn between his alcohol and his familial relationships.

Scene 6:**Pages 35-45***External:*

Virginia needs Lenny to come inside because she desperately needs to be alone with him while he insists that he stays outside because he does not want to hurt her.

Internal:

Virginia wants to be alone with Lenny.
Lenny does not want to lead Virginia on by going inside with her because he knows he will hurt her if he does.

Scene 7:**Pages 46-53***External:*

Mrs. Bell shows Virginia the gun hidden away in the trunk in her basement, though Mrs. Bell is skeptical about showing it to her. Lenny reveals his letter to Virginia.

Internal:

Virginia wants to be alone with the gun.
Lenny does not want to hurt Virginia but has to.
Mrs. Bell becomes less desperate for Virginia's companionship and actually decides to leave her.

Scene 8:**Pages 54-59***External:*

Mrs. Bell reveals the truth about Virginia's facades despite Virginia not wanting to hear any of it. Virginia commits suicide with Mrs. Bell's assistance.

Internal:

Virginia wants to live in denial about what is really going on.
Mrs. Bell does not want Virginia to keep living in denial, and wants to protect her from ever being hurt again.

Appendix D: The Budget

I unfortunately was not accepted as a recipient for the CUGR grant of \$1,000. However, I did receive the Charlie Slavin Research Fund Scholarship for \$200 through the Honors College, which was able to cover the costs of all props, costumes, set dressings, and scenery pieces. Being able to say that I wrote, directed, and produced a show is one feat, but being able to say that I did it all under \$200 is astounding. I was able to pull almost everything from stock and leave purchases to an absolute minimum. In doing so, I was able to prioritize effectively and properly, and was challenged to be much more flexible with the overall aesthetic of my production. The budget is as follows:

The Party

Budget Breakdown

Total Budget: \$200

\$145 Properties/Scenic

\$154.81 Spent

\$25 Costumes

\$44.02 Spent

\$30 Publicity

\$0 Spent

\$198.83 Expenses

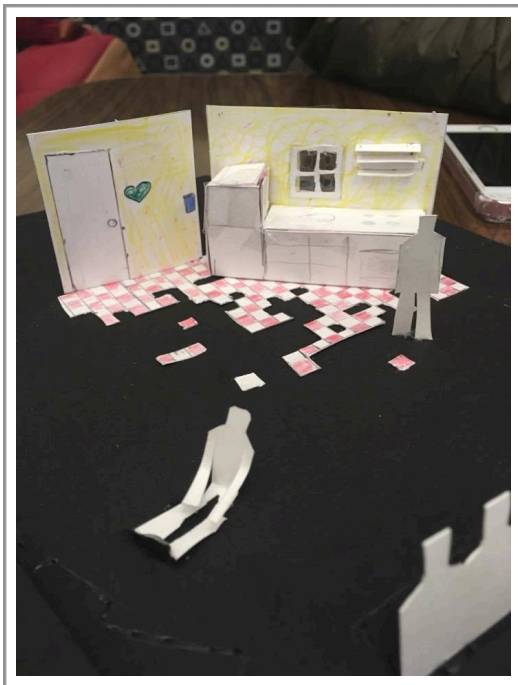
\$198.83 (\$1.17 under budget)

\$73 Revenue made by donation

\$73 Total donated to Maine Masque

Appendix E: The Set

I had always pictured a cluttered set for this production. I imagined Virginia as the type of person who keeps knick-knacks and other paraphernalia gifted to her all throughout her life, fearing that she will hurt someone's feelings if she ever throws them away. I also pictured lots of floral patterns, hence the wall and the chair, as flowers are a rather integral part of the play. Kali came to me with a miniature set design (A), and a floor concept with which I instantly fell in love. The missing and disintegrating tile design represents Virginia's emotional state, and how she feels both incomplete and deteriorating throughout the play. It also stands for how the play actively omits certain parts purposefully. We discussed a color scheme next, and as colors also play a key role in the play, we knew we had to choose carefully. Eventually, we decided on a yellow wall, both to allude to the short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and to allude to Sylvia (the other woman) in the play. We chose a pink stem with white rose paint treatment on the wall to represent Lenny (whose color is white) and Virginia (whose color is revealed to be pink), to show that they own the space despite it being dominantly yellow (controlled by the other woman). It gave the whole set a child-like, doll-house feeling, which alludes heavily to Virginia's traumatic childhood. The knick-knacks on the wall and shelves all allude to certain aspects of the play (a cat in a cage, for instance). I also wanted a cat painting to hang on the wall to foreshadow the Mrs. Bell reveal in Scene 8, and I hung the paintings crookedly to create an uncomfortable and unsettling feeling. The final product (B) almost identically mirrors the design, and I couldn't be happier with the turn out.



(A)



(B)

Appendix F: The Costume Plot

The costumes had to be simple, yet meaningful. I had never originally planned for the actors to portray the fence, so their initial costume plots were much more realized and monochromatic. However, once the fence portrayal was established, I realized it would be far too difficult to have each character make full costume changes before their entrances. It became essential that the costume be easily slipped on and off to avoid awkward amounts of wait time while still accurately depicting each personal color and personality. Sticking to a particular color-scheme while on a tight budget is complicated, but I think we ended up with great finds! Throughout the costuming process, we ran into a black dress problem that forced me to change the ending the play, and the color scheme of Virginia. The two black dresses we ordered for the reveal were incorrectly shipped elsewhere, and we received two dresses of a completely different color and style. A quick trip to the mall and hours of brainstorming resulted in giving Virginia a pink dress and no longer having Mrs. Bell wear the same clothing as Virginia. Instead, we decided that the shift in color from gray to pink signified Virginia's willingness to let Mrs. Bell entirely consume her thoughts, and to eventually commit suicide. I actually preferred that ending to the original ending, and I rewrote the ending of the script to include these new costume changes. It was a disaster-turned-blessing, to say the least. The costume plot is as follows:

The Party

Costume Plot

Character	Costume
VIRGINIA	Gray peacoat, Gray bathrobe, Nude shoes, Pink dress, Nude slip
MRS. BELL	Pink robe, Pink glasses, Pink jacket, Pink slippers
APRIL	Blond wig, Yellow jacket, Green sweater, Black long-sleeve shirt, Black pants, Black heels
MARVIN	Brown suit-coat, Black long-sleeve shirt, Black pants, Black shoes
LENNY	White sweater, Black long-sleeve shirt, Black pants, Black shoes
FATHER	Blue jacket, Black long-sleeve shirt, Black pants, Black shoes
MOTHER	Purple scarf, Black long-sleeve shirt, Black pants, Black shoes

Appendix G: The Properties Plot

This was arguably the most difficult aspect of the show. I initially toyed with the idea of having the actors mime the props, but I soon realized how vital and integral each prop is to the overall show. I knew I needed the audience to see Virginia baking the cake, and to see the colors of the phone and the clock and the flowers. The symbolic aspects of each item are too important to leave out, and I felt the show wouldn't have as much impact without props. To imitate baking a real cake, we bought cake mixes and pre-set them in each of the bowls, then had Virginia add in a few real ingredients so that, to the audience, it appeared as though she'd created the batter herself. We did the same thing with the frosting, and I think it worked out brilliantly. Then, we cut a hole in the back of the stove so that our run crew could swap the cake batter for an actual cake each night, giving the illusion that Virginia baked a cake. My favorite prop was the trunk. I think it's allusion to childhood and innocence is well-crafted, and the juxtaposition between its exterior and interior is really quite powerful. The properties plot is as follows:

The Party

Properties Plot

Scene 1 (pg. 3-7)	Cat
Scene 2 (pg. 8-14)	Shopping cart Grocery bags containing: (Carton of eggs, Half gallon of milk, Bag of flour, Bag of sugar, Butter, Cocoa powder, Vanilla extract, Vegetable oil) Cheese platter Soda/Chips Balloons (pink) Streamers (green, yellow, pink) Scissors Mixing bowls (2 blue, 1 green) Mixing spoons and measuring cups The List Pack of cigarettes w/Black lighter Brown CD player Blue cordless wall-phone Green heart-shaped clock Flowery chair Dining table and 5 chairs Fridge Stove Counter Sink Trash can

Scene 3 (pg. 15-19)	Baking pan (2) Wooden spoon
Scene 4 (pg. 20-27)	Dish rag Oven mitts (blue) Cake (2) (1 is disposed of, 1 is burnt)
Scene 5 (pg. 28-34)	Green vase of flowers (white roses, yellow tulips, pink hydrangeas, 1 rose is wilted) Frosting (chocolate) Bobby pin
Scene 6 (pg. 35-45)	White canvas tote bag
Scene 7 (pg. 46-53)	Blue comb White wooden trunk with pink roses painted on Key Gun Pencil
Scene 8 (pg. 54-59)	Claw foot tub Balloons (Blue, White, Purple, Green, Brown)

Appendix H: The Lighting Plot

The lighting was easily the most changed thing during tech week. I don't think we ran the show with the proper lighting plot until opening night, and even then a few of the cues were still incorrect. Initially, we played around with elements of harsh pink being scattered throughout the show, hoping to demonstrate that the scenes were all being seen through Virginia's perception. However, the more we kept adding in the pink, the more confusing the story became, as the audience was now expected to interpret the lights on top of everything else. I believe it was the Wednesday before we opened that I scrapped the pink from every scene (save the last scene), and I opted for a more neutral wash throughout, with hints of spotlights and isolation when necessary. I particularly enjoyed how the dance light turned out, as it seemed to be like a beam of light shining down from Heaven. In the two photos below, the difference in lighting from the beginning to the end is quite apparent, and I think it draws a clearer picture overall.

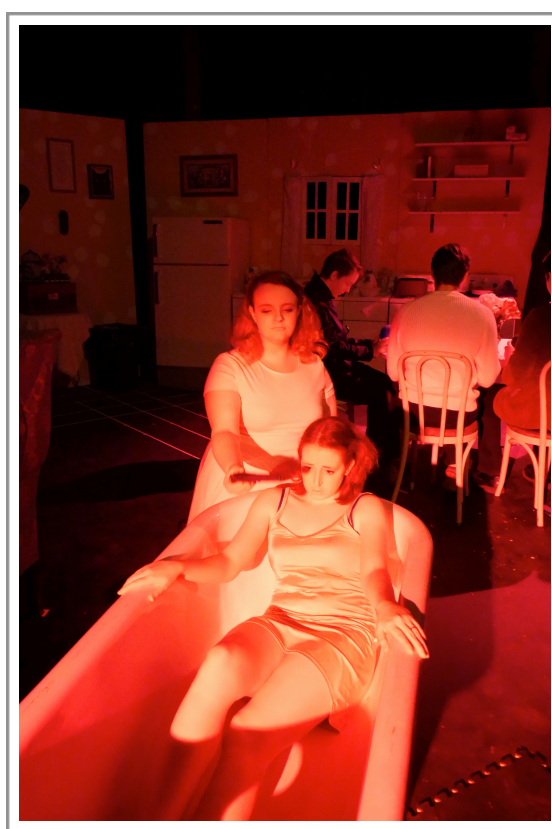


Photo Credit: Andrew Moran

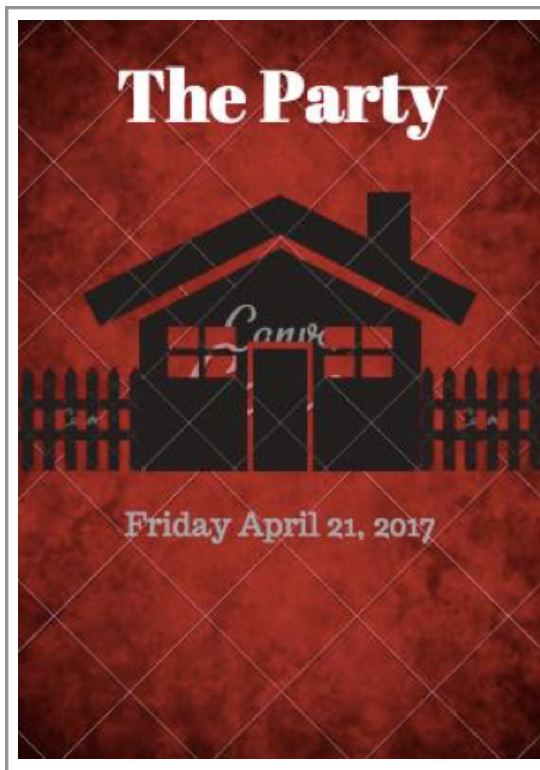
Appendix I: The Sound Design

The pre-show music is one of my favorite aspects of this show. I chose music from the forties, fifties, and sixties to give a sullen, eerie tone upon entering. Each song chosen discusses the topic of love, and what it's like to lose someone you love. I imagined Virginia putting on her old records, staring out the window, and listening to all of these pieces of music as I chose them. I tried to even create a sort of dialogue in the ordering of the pieces, alternating male-female-male-female throughout the playlist, keeping her relationships with Lenny and Marvin in mind. I also tried to pick all female songs that discussed going crazy, and feeling desperate, lonely, and helpless—all the ways in which Virginia feels. More for fun than anything, I included “It’s My Party” by Lesley Gore, as I think the lyrical content of the piece speaks true for the content of the play. My favorite song on the playlist is “Crazy” by Patsy Cline, because I think it fits Virginia’s entire persona perfectly, as it discusses a woman who thinks she’s crazy for loving the man she loves. I enjoy the subtlety of the playlist; it adds an extra layer of depth that I’m sure most people completely disregarded.

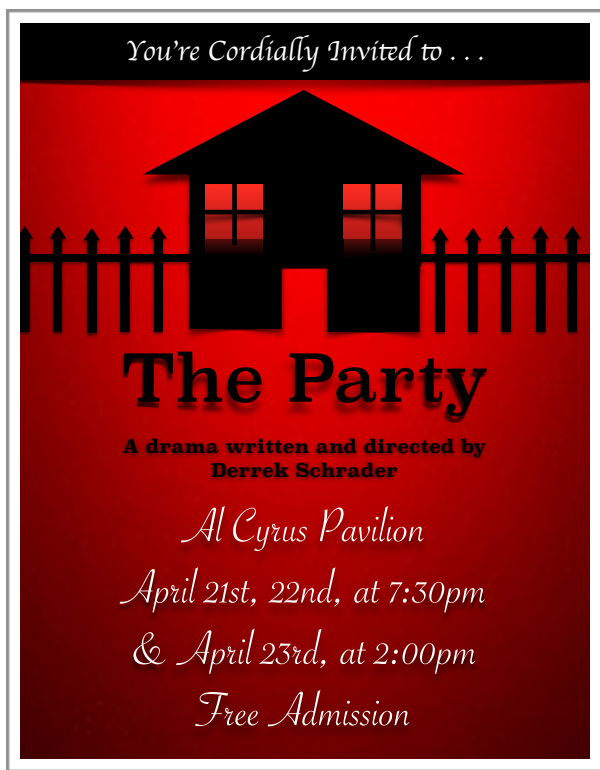


Appendix J: The Publicity

Taylor came to me with a rough draft of the poster (A) a few days into the process. We discussed having a shadowed house with a black fence, as it pertains directly to the play, and we both agreed on the background being a vibrant red that darkens near the corners. Having looked around at other posters for various events, we noticed a lack of bold, dark colors, and thought the poster would contrast its neighbors beautifully. The colors also allude to the colors used in the final scene's lighting plot of the play, so I thought it tied in nicely with the overall appeal. I am pleased with how the final poster turned out (B).



(A)



(B)

IV. The Author's Biography

Derrek Schrader was born in Norway, Maine. He grew up in Bridgton, Maine, and graduated from Lake Region High School in 2013. He crafted his love for theatre in high school, and participated in numerous productions whilst there, such as *The Crucible*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, and *Legally Blonde*. Derrek majored in English with a minor in Theatre at the University of Maine, and is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, and Alpha Psi Omega Honors Societies. He acted in many of the major productions at the university, including *The Cherry Orchard*, *Urinetown*, and *The Pajama Game*. He also began his work as a Properties Master, with credits on productions such as *Big Love*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Pajama Game*, *Dog Sees God*, and more. After graduation, Derrek will be working as a Properties Intern at Theatre at Monmouth, and plans to continue writing. He would like to someday become an author.